

**From Fan Videos to Crowdsourcing: The Political Economy of User-Driven Online Media
Platforms and Practices**

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ABSTRACT

From Fan Videos to Crowdsourcing: The Political Economy of User-Driven Online Media Platforms and Practices

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Following its rise to popularity from 2004 onwards, an increasingly idealistic and dominant conception of platforms, practices, and projects shaped by the Web 2.0 paradigm or the Social Web would emerge and rehabilitate past utopian assertions about the democratizing, participatory, and collaborative potential of the Internet, so as to attractively characterize them as enabling radically empowering forms of online participation by average citizens. In this dissertation, the core features of the affectively charged discourse surrounding this growing media environment are critically examined in order to understand their misleading character and supportive function within the communicative economy of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and the media apparatus of flexible control strategies that sustains it. Moreover, with the help of critical-theoretical, political-economic, and autonomist theories, this dissertation analyzes a set of representative online media practices driven by users and embodying the individualistic and collective incarnations of the Social Web — such as YouTube-based gameplay commentary videos and fanvid parodies of animated media from Japan along with key examples of media crowdsourcing like the *Life in a Day* documentary and the *Star Wars Uncut* remake project. Its analysis of these case studies exposes how the above media apparatus of strategies and decisions increasingly shaping this digital media ecosystem, while encouraging the creative agency of online users, often results in its flexible control by corporate interests and the formation of new forms of power relations, inequality, and exploitation.

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Introduction

Since the popularization of the Web 2.0 concept in 2004 by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty as a means to rehabilitate the image of the Web following the dotcom crash and the growing criticism of the cyber-utopianism of the 1990s, user-driven online media platforms and practices, which are either heavily or partially informed by its associated ideas, have come to be perceived as alternative, inclusive, and communitarian foundations that disrupt traditional mass media industries and differentiate themselves from the latter by radically empowering average citizens to participate and collaborate more deeply within the realm of politics and culture and to create and distribute new and original media content, thus circumventing the restrictive gatekeeping and shaping influence of these industries' profit-driven representatives. Contrary to this popular characterization of Web 2.0 platforms and practices as novel and relatively autonomous phenomena, the political-economic analysis of this twenty first century online media ecosystem driven by the participation of networked users¹ — which will be the core focus of this dissertation — will demonstrate how this now dominant media environment and its seemingly novel network of corporate actors are always intricately connected to the existing capitalistic interests of established and more traditional media industries as well as influenced by them and the formal elements of the texts they produce. Moreover, as will be further illustrated within this project's many chapters, this persistent connection is an important factor shaping the types of hierarchies, constraints, power relations, inequality, and exploitation that carry over into this new media ecosystem and undercut the often utopian discourse of empowerment associated with it.

Exemplifying this tendency, since its launch in 2005, one Web 2.0-based media platform in particular, YouTube, has become increasingly vulnerable to the inevitable constraints resulting from its always present connection and relationship with mainstream media industries due to its growing status as a popular online repository for amateur and professional media, including transformative creative work by online users that appropriates audiovisual material from pre-existing cultural texts. More specifically, it has come to be subject to various platform-related

¹ Throughout this dissertation, the term "ecosystem" will be deployed to describe this dissertation's core object analysis: our twenty first century online media environment that is increasingly driven by user-generated content and influenced by the stated principles associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm. This choice is made in order to foreground the diverse population of online users that tend to inhabit this environment as well as the relational and dynamic networks of strategies, architectural elements, and social and economic actors and interests with which they interact within it. Unlike an array of other concepts, the term "ecosystem" specifically places the contingent interactions between the tactics of creative online users and the dynamic environmental components that surround them to the forefront.

copyright enforcement measures intended to appease the proprietary demands of the film, music, television, and digital games industries. For instance, a scene from the 2004 German film *Downfall* about the final ten days of Adolf Hitler — in which Hitler expresses his anger and frustration with the military and over his impending defeat after being informed of Waffen-SS General Felix Steiner's failure to follow an order and mount an expected counter-attack during WWII's Battle of Berlin — would come to be appropriated by YouTube's users from 2006 onwards who use it in order to insert original comedic subtitles within it and produce transformative video parodies recontextualizing the scene as a rant against a wide range of contemporary topics. After being distributed on YouTube and circulating more widely as a viral trend, in 2010, these YouTube-based parody videos drew the attention of the film's distributor Constantin Film, which sought to control and restrict such creative content through the partially automated copyright enforcement strategies and content filtering systems adopted by the platform.² As will be illustrated in this dissertation's third chapter, a similar conflict between the tactics of YouTube's creative users and Google's strategies and systems for detecting the copyright-infringing content of the film and television industry would arise around the same period following the widespread popularity of fanvid series parodying Japanese animation on the platform. The type of power relationships resulting from such interactions, however, is often significantly downplayed within more utopian incarnations of Web 2.0 discourse due to the narrative of amateur empowerment it frequently perpetuates. For instance, in a famous 2006 *Time* magazine article declaring the Person of the Year as “You,” Lev Grossman would idealistically characterize Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube as being transformative platforms for the revolutionary and democratic empowerment of average citizens all over the world — platforms that would supposedly empower such citizens to resist the traditional gatekeepers of global media and disrupt the world of professionals through their collaborative, non-commercial, and participatory productivity and media.³

Partially lending credence to this narrative of amateur empowerment via participation within Web 2.0-based social media platforms like YouTube but also subverting it is the online

² See Andrew Clay, “Blocking, Tracking, and Monetizing: YouTube Copyright Control and the Downfall Parodies,” in *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube*, eds. Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 219-233.

³ Lev Grossman, “You – Yes, You – Are TIME’s Person of the Year,” *Time*, December 25th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

video-based media practice known as gameplay commentary, which has rapidly risen in popularity and visibility over the last decade. Created and circulated widely by the connected users of online media platforms like YouTube since 2007, gameplay commentary videos — which entail video footage of gameplay captured from a performance of a digital game and accompanied by voice-over commentary — eventually accumulate such a large audience that YouTube itself, game corporations, and a new social media organization known as Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) began to enter into partnerships with YouTube-based gameplay commentators in an effort to monetize their viewership and convert the growing affective attachment of viewers to a commentator into profit. Based on social media platforms like YouTube, MCNs promise its user-creators, including commentators, a variety of services related to monetization and audience building in exchange for a percentage of their ad revenue. In opposition to Grossman's characterization of Web 2.0 participation and user-generated content as being predominantly intrinsically motivated, YouTube-based gameplay commentators often convert the audiences that they have accumulated through their content into ad revenue that would benefit them. More specifically, they achieve this goal by using the monetization features of YouTube and entering into the above type of partnerships with the various corporate entities tied to Google's platform. Thus, the form of empowerment experienced by gameplay commentators using YouTube and other creators of user content could frequently be both cultural *and* financial in character and their participatory labour could often be driven by motives that were intrinsic *and* extrinsic. One of the most prominent examples of the financial empowerment that such creative YouTube users can achieve involves the Swedish YouTube user Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, also known as PewDiePie, who has come to attract over 54 million subscribers with his gameplay commentary videos and comedic content.⁴ Moreover, through various viewer- and user-based monetization systems and partnerships with the gaming-focused and advertising driven sub-network Polaris of the YouTube-based MCN Maker Studios, Google itself, and other media sponsors, PewDiePie would eventually accumulate a total of 15 million dollars in revenue during 2016 alone.⁵ Seeing the potential profit that could be accumulated through this user-driven media practice, various media companies including Google began to

⁴ “About,” *YouTube*, accessed March 3rd, 2017, <http://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie/about>

⁵ Madeline Berg, "The Highest-Paid YouTube Stars 2016: PewdiePie Remains 1 with \$ 15 Million," *Forbes*, Dec. 5th, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2016/12/05/the-highest-paid-youtube-stars-2016-pewdiepie-remains-no-1-with-15-million/#31423e1b7713>

invest money in the MCNs and social media platforms that enabled gameplay commentary or to create their own platforms dedicated to this user activity. For example, from 2012 to 2015, Google and Warner Bros have invested millions of dollars in the gaming-oriented and YouTube-based MCN Machinima.⁶ In 2014, Maker Studios was purchased by Disney for approximately 500 million dollars.⁷ In the same year, Twitch — an online media platform dedicated to live-streamed gameplay commentary — was purchased by Amazon for 970 million.⁸ In the following year in 2015, as a means to compete with Twitch, YouTube launched a competing livestreaming platform, hub, and app called YouTube Gaming, which aggregates gameplay commentary videos and facilitates real-time streaming spectatorship for creators and users.⁹ What's the takeaway? Streaming videos is big money, on which companies are willing to bet bundles of cash. This increasing commercialization of the participatory online media platforms emerging in the twenty first century significantly undermines Web 2.0 discourse's tendency to frame them as predominantly communal, social, and inclusive spaces driven by an impartial desire to empower average citizens and amateur creators by enabling them to freely distribute media.

As this dissertation's case studies will show, established and emerging media industries often develop or encourage the development of platform features and strategies within this Web 2.0-based media ecosystem that allow them to control and channel online user participation in a manner which ultimately favours their interests and undermines the narrative of radical inclusivity and creator empowerment often attached to this environment. Despite the potential of these decisions to substantively empower figures like PewDiePie, these biases will be shown to produce unequal power relations with the users and groups who produce this valuable media activity for Web 2.0 platforms and their media partners. The critical analysis of the unequal

⁶ For reports on these investments, see Connie Guglielmo, "Google Invests in Machinima, Sees 'Financial Return,'" *Forbes*, May 21st, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/connieguglielmo/2012/05/21/google-invests-in-machinima-sees-financial-return/>; Todd Spangler, "Warner Bros. Is Buying a Stake in Struggling YouTube Net Machinima. Here's Why," *Variety*, March 10th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/warner-bros-is-buying-a-stake-in-struggling-youtube-net-machinima-heres-why-1201127883/>; Andrew Wallenstein, "Warner Bros. Increases Investment in Machinima," *Variety*, February 19th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/warner-bros-increases-investment-in-machinima-1201437440/>

⁷ Todd Spangler, "Disney Buys Maker Studios in Deal Worth At Least 500 Million," *Variety*, March 24th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/biz/news/disney-buys-maker-studios-in-deal-worth-at-least-500-million-1201145068/>

⁸ Kim Gittleson, "Amazon buys Video-game Streaming Site Twitch," *BBC News*, August 25th, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-28930781>

⁹ See Stuart Dredge, "Google launches YouTube Gaming to challenge Amazon-owned Twitch," *The Guardian*, August 26th, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/aug/26/youtube-gaming-live-website-apps>; Chris Foxx, "YouTube Gaming launch poses challenge to Twitch," *BBC News*, August 26th, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34015600>

power relationships emerging between the users creatively contributing to social media platforms and media crowdsourcing projects and the latter's managers and owners will be one of the core elements of this research project's political-economic examination of this twenty first century online media ecosystem and its flexible encouragement and control of user-driven labour, affect, and media in service of the accumulation of profit and attention pursued by our contemporary communicative paradigm of neoliberal capitalism.

In addition to the profit-driven encouragement of more individualistic manifestations of user-based online media practices like gameplay commentary on social media platforms like YouTube, another reflection of the increasing integration of user-generated content within the capitalistic strategies of existing media industries can be seen in the Web 2.0 practice of media crowdsourcing, a seemingly more collaborative form of networked content generation. As with platforms like YouTube, media crowdsourcing projects rely on the aggregation and control of user-generated media online, often in the service of profit and the promotional campaigns of specific media corporations. Consequently, they frequently cultivate asymmetrical power relations with their participants. In contrast to the Web 2.0 practice of gameplay commentary, which is initiated by the users of social media platforms like YouTube, media crowdsourcing projects — while still dependent on the creative agency of online users — are usually initiated and organized by already established members of the creative industries. They also typically involve an indeterminate crowd of online users who participate together in a collaboration with a professional artist or media corporation for little to no financial compensation. Recently launched in the Summer of 2016 and inspired by YouTube's crowdsourced global documentary mosaic of the world, *Life in Day* (2011) — a media project that will be thoroughly analyzed within this dissertation's fifth chapter — a Canadian incarnation titled *Canada in a Day* became the newest iteration of this crowdsourcing format created by British production company Scott Free Productions. Within this project, participating Canadians were encouraged by CTV, Bell Media, and Screen Siren Pictures through social media platforms like YouTube and Twitter to contribute footage taken on September 10th, 2016 to the website Canadainaday.ca in an effort to create a collective time-capsule representing a diversity of perspectives about what it means to be Canadian, so it can be aired on CTV in June 2017 for the nation's 150th anniversary.¹⁰ Echoing

¹⁰ "Canada in a Day," *Screen Sirens Pictures*, accessed March 4th, 2017, <http://www.screensiren.ca/portfolio-item/canada-in-a-day/>

the Web 2.0 rhetoric of creative empowerment and democratization seen in Grossman's article, *Canada in a Day* frames all participants as its "filmmaker" and presents itself as "Your film, your voice, your chance to speak to Canada and the world."¹¹ Akin to contemporary Web 2.0-based online media platforms and how they promise users the newfound ability to freely express themselves creatively and disseminate their work, this media crowdsourcing project would also represent itself as an "opportunity to share our lives" that was not previously available to potential participants.¹² However, as will be seen with this dissertation's analyses of *Life in a Day* and the *Star Wars Uncut* project, the seemingly more collaborative incarnation of Web 2.0 media culture embodied by such crowdsourcing projects offers only a limited form of creative and expressive empowerment for the average citizen. For instance, while its owners can potentially profit from the end result, *Canada in a Day* only offers a symbolic directorial credit and no monetary compensation to the few users who both participate and are ultimately selected to be part of the final film, nor does it afford participants any real input with regard to its final form — choices that severely limit the degree of creative and financial empowerment that participants can receive for their contributions.¹³ Moreover, the project's owners like Bell Media reserve the right, within its terms and conditions, to alter the submitted user content and later exploit it within a variety of different venues and formats and for an array of different reasons.¹⁴ Thus, a very clear power difference emerges between the owners and organizers of *Canada in a Day* and its participants through these project decisions and contractual strategies.

As suggested by the above example, this dissertation will counter the pseudo-revolutionary discourse associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm, seeking to uncover the similar power asymmetries and disempowering constraints often masked and supported by it. More concretely, it will do so by analyzing case studies that represent the personal and collaborative dimensions of a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem — which include user-generated content like fan videos and gameplay commentary, but also instances of media crowdsourcing like *Life in a Day* and the crowdsourced remake project *Star Wars Uncut*. In order to accomplish this goal,

¹¹ "Canada in a Day," *Screen Sirens Pictures*, accessed March 4th, 2017, <http://www.screensiren.ca/portfolio-item/canada-in-a-day/>

¹² "Canada in a Day: Director's Vision," YouTube video, 1:32, posted by "Canada in a Day," August 3rd, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKBrHMBSEg0>

¹³ "'Canada in a Day' Terms and Conditions," *Canada in a Day*, accessed March 4th, 2017, <https://canadainaday.ca/terms>

¹⁴ "'Canada in a Day' Terms and Conditions," *Canada in a Day*, accessed March 4th, 2017, <https://canadainaday.ca/terms>

this dissertation will undertake a political-economic, critical-theoretical, and partially autonomist analysis of the user-driven forms of online media participation and the utopian discourse associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm. Rather than merely determining whether or not the power relations found within the twenty first century's increasingly user-driven media environment fully match up with or live up to the rhetoric attached to this paradigm, the purpose of this research project will be to answer the following questions: How and through what type of apparatus do asymmetrical power relations form within a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem? What type of relationship do the strategies and decisions that make up this apparatus have with the tactical participatory activity of the online users who contribute to the above media ecosystem? And, lastly, what kind of capitalistic paradigm of control do these strategies and the tactical responses of users reflect?

In order to answer these questions about this new ecosystem, this project will detail and investigate the hegemonizing function of Web 2.0 discourse and its key tendencies, especially its tendency to associate user-driven online media platforms with the participatory empowerment of individual citizens within the realm of media production and distribution as well as to cultivate a neoliberal creative subject in the process. Furthermore, the more idealistic assertions about the Web 2.0 paradigm found within this discourse will be demonstrated to be products of pre-existing rhetoric about the Internet and Cyberspace dominant in the 1990s and of the affect-laden neoliberal structure of feeling that the latter represents. Simultaneously, this discourse analysis will foreground how, through such claims, Web 2.0 rhetoric often promises users an affectively fulfilling sensation of creative empowerment, playful freedom, and communal connection when they engage with online media platforms and projects as a means of motivating them into offering their free and often immaterial labour and participating in often unequal exchanges of value and power relationships. Through this analysis, the utopian discourse often surrounding the Web 2.0 paradigm will be revealed to mask and support asymmetrical power relations within the now dominant user-driven media ecosystem that it describes.

Complementing this discourse analysis will be the examination of select online practices driven by users and native to Web 2.0-influenced media platforms and projects. These media practices — detailed in this introduction's later chapter summaries — are analyzed in terms of their history, the media objects they produce, and in some cases with regard to their tactical engagement with the neoliberal apparatus of control strategies currently emerging within this

twenty first century media ecosystem. The critical analysis of these case studies will foreground how Web 2.0 platforms, entities, and projects and the other media industries to which they are still connected shape these creative practices. For example, it will reveal how a related apparatus of discursive and non-discursive strategies, laws, and decisions adopted by traditional and emergent media companies and institutions results in the control and channeling of users' participatory labour and its products. It will also demonstrate how this apparatus cultivates unequal power relationships with citizens that partially echo those within mass media industries. This analysis will thus critique the misleading discursive association of impartial inclusivity, empowerment, and novel change with Web 2.0. platforms and projects. The aim is to illustrate how Web 2.0 discourse and the other strategies and decisions composing this apparatus support a neoliberal mode of capitalistic control that — rather than completely excluding or determining the participatory production of creative users — encourages its free expression within certain parameters and includes it while seeking to channel the labour involved and commodify its products for profit. That said, despite the seemingly totalizing portrait of control described above, this dissertation will also recognize and highlight the mutually constitutive tactical interactions of online users with such strategies and the circumscribed agency they represent.

Review of Critical Literature on Web 2.0 Paradigm

This dissertation's analysis of the rhetoric and user-driven media practices associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm builds on the mid-2000s critical turn within digital media and Internet studies towards these topics and the utopian conceptions of online participation and collaboration often attached to them. Situating itself among this critical shift, this analysis will similarly resist the tendency of certain popular commentators and scholars to frame online media platforms influenced by the Web 2.0 paradigm as more open alternative spaces that avoid the gatekeeping associated with mass media industries. It will also resist the propensity of such writers to view these platforms as holding the potential to democratically include all users in the world and empower them to fully participate and collaborate in the realm of media production and distribution in conjunction with professionals and other connected citizens. This critical analysis will also engage in similar debates about the liberatory potential of twenty first century forms of online participation and collaboration and their role within a capitalistic digital economy increasingly driven by user communication. Moreover, it will intervene in this literature's interrogation of the term "platform" — a concept central to Web 2.0 rhetoric, but which also

begins to contradict it as the social media spaces it often describes are shown to be digital enclosures with their own forms of gatekeeping similar to the so-called walled gardens of the Web 1.0 era. Using the above critical turn as a foundation, this dissertation will also engage with wider questions about the type of digital labour and forms of power and control that are becoming dominant within our contemporary online media ecosystem while highlighting the power relations and powerful interests which are often cultivated within it and partially masked by the frequent utopianism of Web 2.0 discourse.

Emerging amidst ongoing debates from the mid-1990s onwards about the liberatory potential of participation on the Internet — a discursive context that will be described in the next chapter — the theoretical work of Tiziana Terranova stands out, significantly informing the growing corpus of digital media studies literature criticizing Web 2.0 trends upon which this dissertation's very own critical approach to the new media ecosystem they shape will build. Within her seminal 2000 article "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy", Terranova described the digital economy's channeling of users' "free labour" by drawing on the autonomist Marxist work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and intervening in related debates about the dominant form of labour valued within late capitalism. From this foundation, she rejects Richard Barbrook's idealistic view of participatory online activity as shaping a gift economy separate from late capitalistic structures.¹⁵ Instead, she recontextualizes this digital activity as an un-coerced and unwaged form of free labour that is voluntarily contributed to a 'social factory,' an autonomist concept signaling the expansion of labour processes during late capitalism into all corners of society.¹⁶ Deviating from Marxist visions of exploited labour as being coerced, her article recognizes that this Web-based free labour is the voluntary product of citizens' cultural and affective wish to undertake a more creatively fulfilling form of work as well as of late capitalism's parallel embrace of knowledge, affect, and cultural creativity as untapped sources of value.¹⁷ Ultimately, connecting Barbrook's vision of Internet participation to late capitalism's more flexible mode of control, Terranova shows how the free labour of online users retains a degree of relative autonomy and constituent power akin to Hardt and Negri's notion of

¹⁵ Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 63, Volume 18, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 36; Terranova's article is partially a response to the ideas presented within Richard Barbrook, "Cybercommunism: How the Americans are Superseding Capitalism in Cyberspace," *Science as Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (2000): 5-40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/095054300114314>.

¹⁶ Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," 33-35.

¹⁷ Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," 36-38.

immaterial labour that — rather than being fully captured by capitalism or completely serving its functions — is now included, channeled, and integrated within its flows, thus existing in a supportive, compatible, and mutually constitutive relationship with it.¹⁸ Terranova's autonomist recontextualization of the participation of online users as a form of labour connected to late capitalism became an important intervention within scholarly debates about the liberatory potential, autonomy, and empowerment afforded to citizens by the Web — an intervention that will strongly inform this dissertation's critical vision of the relative autonomy afforded by Web 2.0 media platforms and projects to online users, their labour, and their immaterial products.

Terranova's nuanced work anticipated later cultural debates wherein certain digital media scholars and commentators criticized and interrogated their counterparts' more utopian characterization of online user participation and collaboration within Web 2.0 environments as an alternative, empowering, and liberatory form of creative production for average citizens that has greater autonomy from the limitations, gatekeeping, and influence of capitalistic cultural industries. While this growing criticism would often manifest itself within the non-academic commentary of popular writers like Nicholas Carr, Andrew Keen, and Jaron Lanier,¹⁹ this dissertation will build on the growing corpus of critical literature influenced by Terranova's work from the mid-2000s onwards — literature that more directly contributed to this digital media studies debate about the character of online user participation shaped by the Web 2.0 paradigm. For example, part of this initial shift towards a more critical approach to "Web 2.0" user activity inspired by Terranova was a 2007 *Ephemera* article. Within it, scholars Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus would critically conceive of user productivity on the platform MySpace as a new affective and subjective "2.0" incarnation of immaterial labour — a type of labour which produces a new form of value that capital seeks to channel.²⁰ Further contributing to this emerging critical perspective is the post-2008 work of Henry Jenkins on participatory culture with its repeated criticism of the Web 2.0 paradigm and its utopian rhetoric for: 1) commercially exploiting the

¹⁸ Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," 37-39, 41-43, 49, 51, 54.

¹⁹ For examples of such Web 2.0 critiques from less scholarly sources, see Nicholas Carr, "The Amoralism of Web 2.0," *Rough Type*, October 3rd, 2005, accessed December 3rd, 2016, <http://www.rough.type.com/?p=110>; Andrew Keen, "Web 2.0.: The Second Generation of the Internet has Arrived. It is Worst than You Think," *The Weekly Standard*, Feb. 14th, 2006, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/article/7898>; Jaron Lanier, "Digital Maoism: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism," *Edge*, May 29th, 2006, <https://www.edge.org/conversation/digital-maoism-the-hazards-of-the-new-online-collectivism>

²⁰ See Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0: MySpace and Social Networks," *Ephemera*, 7.1. (February 2007): 88-106.

online participatory activity of users by assuming it to be entirely intrinsically motivated,²¹ and 2) masking existing conflicts between users and media corporations over the moral economy of online spaces and how it shapes their activity.²² Within many academic journals from 2008 onwards, capitalism's exploitation of online user participation within Web 2.0 platforms and the misleading conception of such spaces as inherently empowering would continue to be criticized by a wide range of scholars from Bart Cammaerts and Trebor Scholz to José van Dijck and David Nieborg.²³ Contemporaneously, within an increasing number of scholarly books addressing social media platforms like YouTube and their user-generated content — for instance, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009) and *The YouTube Reader* (2009) — media scholars like Jean Burgess, Joshua Green, Mark Andrejevic, and Christian Fuchs would persist in criticizing the platform's alienating exploitation of user labour and data for the benefit of their owners and advertisers while foregrounding the often tense interactions of users and their distinctive social and communal values with YouTube's competing values and strategies for accumulating profit and enforcing copyright.²⁴ The texts of Fuchs, in particular, would criticize

²¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Updated Version, (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 179-180, 326, 334; Henry Jenkins, "The Moral Economy of Web 2.0. (Part Four)," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Web-blog of Henry Jenkins*, March 24th, 2008, http://henryjenkins.org/2008/03/the_moral_economy_of_web_20_pa_3.html; Henry Jenkins, "Why Participatory Culture is Not Web 2.0.: Some Basic Distinctions.," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Web-blog of Henry Jenkins*, May 24th, 2010, http://henryjenkins.org/2010/05/why_participatory_culture_is_n.html

²² Henry Jenkins, "The Moral Economy of Web 2.0. (Part Four)," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Web-blog of Henry Jenkins*, March 24th, 2008, http://henryjenkins.org/2008/03/the_moral_economy_of_web_20_pa_3.html; For another later articulation of this argument, see Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 55, 82-3.

²³ For examples of this growing critical trend with regard to the concept of Web 2.0, see Bart Cammaerts, "Critiques on the Participatory Potentials of Web 2.0." *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 1.4. (2008): 358-377, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2008.00028.x>; Trebor Scholz, "Market Ideology and the Myth of Web 2.0," *First Monday*, 13.3. March 3rd, 2008, <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2138/1945>; Mork Soren Petersen, "Loser Generated Content: From Participation to Exploitation," *First Monday*, 13.3. (March 3rd, 2008). <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2141/1948>; Kylie Jarrett, "Interactivity is Evil: A Critical Investigation of Web 2.0," *First Monday*, 13.3. March 3rd, 2008, <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2140/1947>; José van Dijck and David Nieborg, "Wikinomics and its Discontents: A Critical Analysis of Web 2.0. Business Manifestos," *New Media and Society*, 11.5 (2009): 856, 870-871, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105356>; Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi. "Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation," *The Communication Review*, 14. (2011): 180-183, 189.

²⁴ For examples of this emerging and increasingly large body of critical publications and their decidedly less utopian conception of Web 2.0 phenomenon, see Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), 90-99; Mary Erickson and Janet Wasko, "The Political Economy of Youtube," in *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 372-386; Mark Andrejevic, "Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour," in *The YouTube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 414-420; Paul McDonald, "Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy: Advertising versus Content versus

Web 2.0 platforms for engaging in the surveillance of the participation of users and exploiting its resulting products like data into profitable prosumer commodities sold to advertisers.²⁵ Similarly, while criticizing the utopian framing of the interactive participation of users and foregrounding how it is flexibly controlled in the service of capital as a result of the structures, strategies, and goals of the platform-based digital enclosures in which they willingly participate,²⁶ Andrejevic argues that these participating users actively choose to have their data exploited in support of the uncontrollable capitalistic goals of their owners, rendering them complicit in their subjection.²⁷ Supporting his argument, media theorist Jodi Dean has argued elsewhere in various publications that a communicative mode of capitalism — termed communicative capitalism — has started to materialize democratic ideals of inclusion and participation associated with networked media

Copyright,” in *The YouTube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 387-405; Toby Miller, “Cybertarians of the World Unite: You Have Nothing to Lose but Your Tubes,” in *The YouTube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 424-440; Alexandra Juhasz, “Why not (to) Teach on YouTube,” in *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, eds. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 133-140; Andrew Clay, “Blocking, Tracking, and Monetizing: YouTube Copyright Control and the Downfall Parodies,” in *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube*, eds. Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 219-233; Felix Stalder, “Between Democracy and Spectacle: The Front-End and Back-End of the Social Web,” in *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg, (New York: New York University, 2012), 242-256; Steven Hetcher, “Amateur Creative Digital Content and Proportional Commerce,” in *Amateur Media: Social, Cultural, and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Dan Hunter, Ramon Lobato, Megan Richardson, and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 35-52; Kimberlee Weatherall, “The Relationship Between User-Generated Content and Commerce,” in *Amateur Media: Social, Cultural, and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Dan Hunter, Ramon Lobato, Megan Richardson, and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59-69; Marisol Sandoval, “Social Media?: The Unsocial Character of Capitalist Media,” *Critique, Social Media, and the Information Society*, eds. Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval (New York: Routledge, 2014), 144-164.

²⁵ For his extensive Marxist critiques of the exploitative dimension of Web 2.0 and the data-oriented surveillance that accompanies it, see Christian Fuchs, “Social Software and Web 2.0: Their Sociological Foundations and Implications,” in *Handbook of Research on Web 2.0, 3.0, and X.0: Technologies, Business, and Social Applications*, ed. San Murugesan, Volume II, (Hershey, PA: IGI- Global, 2010), 764-789; Christian Fuchs, “The Contemporary World Wide Web: Social Medium or New Space of Accumulation?,” in *The Political Economies of Media. The Transformation of the Global Media Industries*, eds. Dwayne Winseck and Dal Yong Jin (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 201-220; Christian Fuchs, “New Media, Web 2.0 and Surveillance,” *Sociology Compass* 5.2 (2011): 134-147, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00354.x>; Christian Fuchs, “Web 2.0, Presumption, and Surveillance,” *Surveillance & Society* 8.3 (2011): 288-309; Christian Fuchs, “Critique of the Political Economy of Web 2.0 Surveillance.” in *Internet and Surveillance. The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social media*, ed. Christian Fuchs, Kees Boersma, Anders Albrechtslund and Marisol Sandoval (New York: Routledge, 2012), 31-70; Christian Fuchs, “Web 2.0 Surveillance and Art,” in *Net Works: Case Studies in Web Art and Design*, ed. xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2012), 121-127; Christian Fuchs, “Critique of the Political Economy of Informational Capitalism and Social Media,” in *Critique, Social Media and the Information Society*, ed. Christian Fuchs and Marisol Sandoval (New York: Routledge, 2014), 51-65; Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 97-122.

²⁶ Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance And Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 4-6, 8, 15-18, 28-32, 200-202, 268; Mark Andrejevic, “Authoring User Generated Content,” in *Media Authorship*, eds. Cynthia Chris and David A. Gerstner (New York: Routledge, 2013), 125-126.

²⁷ Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance And Power in the Interactive Era*, 2-3, 104-108, 110, 130-134, 243, 263-4.

technologies as a means to encourage the affective production of personal media like blogs and then capture its traces and energies in service of neoliberal infrastructures and capitalistic interests.²⁸ These interventions avoid more idealistic characterizations of the process by recognizing how it can be channeled by various capitalistic interests for profit and the online users who engage in it can be situated into asymmetrical power relations with them. Informing this dissertation's characterization of online user participation, this recontextualization of the concept resists the excesses of the 'active' and often more optimistic conception of media and cultural engagement and reception appearing after the post-Marxist and Gramscian turn within British Cultural Studies and political theory from 1970s onwards, Michel de Certeau's influential cultural theory in the 1980s, and their joint influence within the popular cultural and media theories of Henry Jenkins and John Fiske.²⁹ This more active conception of reception — which also appeared within Janet Staiger's reformulation of film reception and spectatorship as "perverse"³⁰ and its critical engagement with cultural studies' understanding of such practice — surfaced in response to the more 'passive' and deterministic understanding found within Adornian critical theory and the film-centered apparatus and screen theories of the 1970s.³¹ More

²⁸See Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 2, 17, 22-23; Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 82, 119, 123; Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, (London: Verso, 2012), 106-110, 126-128, 145.

²⁹ See Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 2001), 85, 106-107, 109-113, 115-117, 121-122, 134, 142, 144-145. Influenced by the work of Hall, see Fiske's longstanding recognition of the potentially empowering and resistant forms of active participation and reading afforded by the producerly texts of popular culture and television: John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2003 [1978]), 6-7, 80-82; John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 49-66, 63, 75-79, 13-15; John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2010, [1989]), 109-112; John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (New York: Routledge, 2003, [1989]), 1-12; John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 37-42. See the seminal work of Michel de Certeau and his differentiation between tactics and strategies: Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix-xx. Lastly, see Jenkins' early rejection of audience reception theories like Adornian critical theory that are primarily grounded in the ideological effects on spectators through his early appropriation of De Certeau's work and of recent work on audience reception, which stress the importance of situating cultural reception within a specific context and recognizing its dynamic character along with that of the resistance to hegemony occasionally involved: Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, new edition, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9-50.

³⁰ Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 28-42.

³¹ For examples of these varying schools of theory about film and media reception, see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136; Jean-Louis Beaudry and Alan Williams, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2. (Winter 1974-1975): 39-

in line with some of the above interventions, however, this dissertation's analysis of the participatory activity of online users within the cultural realm will recognize the latter's agency in order to counter what Mark Banks has described as the top-down, macrolevel, and deterministic excesses of critical theory and political economy,³² but it will also acknowledge its present situation amidst a capitalistic context with various corporate actors increasingly seeking to encourage, control, and shape it for profit through more flexible means.

More specifically, Andrejevic's concept of digital enclosure and Dean's notion of communicative capitalism, in particular, will be drawn upon — and, in the latter case, slightly modified — within this dissertation in order to drastically revise the meaning of participation within online media ecosystem, shift it away from the term's more utopian connotations within Web 2.0 discourse, and re-situate it as the valued resource of a new capitalistic paradigm of control. However, this dissertation's revision of this highly idealized concept is particularly indebted to the more specific contributions of Andrejevic on the notion of digitally networked participation along with Nico Carpentier's and Mirko Tobias Schäfer's respective interventions to combat the concept's idealization within Web 2.0 discourse. For his part, Andrejevic makes an important distinction between a commercial and cybernetic form of interactive participation that only affords participants the ability to offer feedback that might influence the strategies adopted to fulfill pre-determined goals and, conversely, a more democratic incarnation of participation that entails shared control over such goals, the architecture of the adopted platform, and its database.³³ Like Andrejevic, Carpentier also distinguishes a "minimalist" form of media participation by users that is channeled in service of corporate interests from a "maximalist" incarnation that includes a diversity of participants and a greater degree of power sharing among them.³⁴ Such distinctions importantly resist the reductive utopian conception of online

47; Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique and Ideology: Camera, Perspective, Depth of Field," in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 40-57; Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/ideology/ criticism', trans. Susan Bennett, *Screen* 12, no. 2 (1971): 145-155; Colin McCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," *Screen* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1976): 7-27; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18; Stephen Heath, "On Screen, in Frame: Film and Ideology", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 3 (August 1976): 251-65; Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen*, 18, no. 4 (1977): 48-76; Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Fall 1974): 22-31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1211439>.

³²Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17, 19-20, 27, 39.

³³ Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance And Power in the Interactive Era*, 44, 49, 201-202, 242-243, 259.

³⁴ Nico Carpentier, "The Concept of participation. If They Have Access and Interact, Do they Really Participate?" *Communication Management Quarterly* 21 (2011): 26.

participation as a radically empowering process — which is often currently perpetuated within Web 2.0 discourse — by highlighting the contingent character of the participatory process and foregrounding the possibility of more limited incarnations. In a 2009 article, Carpentier would further complicate what he views as Web 2.0 discourse's idealized resurrection of the concept of participation by criticizing how participation's renewed celebration as an inherently beneficial process — now strongly associated with new media and its image of novelty — has disconnected it from the contingent cultural, political, and communicative contexts in which it appears.³⁵ Conversely, Carpentier, within a 2011 article, would also assert that participation and its understanding are always situated within and shaped by contingent social contexts and processes that can involve a variety of actors.³⁶ Consequently, he has stated elsewhere that certain forms of participation do not even “touch the core of the power relations of the social systems” in which they exist.³⁷ Likewise, Schäfer himself has also foregrounded elsewhere how, despite the utopian vision of participation promulgated within Web 2.0 discourse, underlying power structures are often not fully changed by online user participation and, as in the past, new corporations within the culture industries have become increasingly interested in controlling its media products.³⁸ Echoing Carpentier's earlier critique of Web 2.0 rhetoric, Schäfer criticizes its promise of empowerment via networked digital technologies' supposedly greater inclusion of the participation of users within the realm of politics, cultural production, and media ownership because it draws attention away from the larger network of social actors engaging in this type of participation and the differing levels of usage and design in which they are involved.³⁹ In order to correct this oversight, he presents online user participation as being shaped by a Foucauldian media apparatus defined by the interactive relations between people's social use of new technologies and the discourse, technological design, and network of actors, which are connected

³⁵Nico Carpentier, “Participation is Not Enough: The Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices,” *European Journal of Communication*, 24.4. (2009): 408, 410-411, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323109345682>.

³⁶Carpentier, “The Concept of participation. If They Have Access and Interact, Do they Really Participate?,” 24-25.

³⁷Carpentier, “Participation is Not Enough: The Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices,” 417.

³⁸ Mirko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011) , 10-11. To see an earlier text by Schäfer making many of these same claims, see Mirko Tobias Schäfer, “Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation,” in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, eds. Marianne van den Boomen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 147-158.

³⁹ Mirko Tobias Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 11, 13, 15, 25-31, 42, 151.

to them.⁴⁰ From this perspective, he, like Andrejevic and Carpentier, offers a more complex portrayal of participation within society by acknowledging its different incarnations. Specifically, he differentiates explicit participation — which involves users' active appropriation and transformation of existing media products for diverse reasons — from implicit participation, which signals the extension of the cultural industries into the field of participatory user activity and refers to the latter's anticipation, embedding, and shaping through the design of technologies and Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube.⁴¹ While the two concepts are not mutually exclusive as will be seen in this dissertation's second chapter, Schäfer's description of implicit participation acknowledges how participation can entail confrontations between users and traditional business models over copyright as well as the channeling of their activity for profit via the design of Web 2.0 applications, without offering them any substantive control over their architecture and the distribution of revenue.⁴² By drawing on Schäfer's notions of a media apparatus and implicit participation while building on the increasing recognition of the limited character of digitally networked user participation due to the capitalistic socio-economic systems to which it can be attached, this dissertation's analysis of participatory online media practices unveils the apparatus of platform decisions, flexible control strategies, and discursive claims that anticipate, shape, limit, and channel the user participation found within YouTube and media crowdsourcing projects to the primary benefit of various capitalistic interests. This analysis also uncovers the asymmetrical power relations between the former interests and users that online participation tends to involve. Echoing Schäfer and Carpentier's interventions, it will conclude that, due to the limited participation afforded to them within these online platforms and projects in exchange for their labour, users often have very little substantive control over the structures, design choices, goals, and revenue distribution systems of the platforms which they inhabit or the power relations and inequality these elements tend to enact.

Furthermore, aside from this critical body of literature on online participation within a Web 2.0 media ecosystem, this dissertation will also build on recent interventions within media studies with regard to the meaning of collaboration within a highly user-driven media ecosystem where it is often idealized as mutually beneficial process by Web 2.0 discourse and where

⁴⁰ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 15-16.

⁴¹ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 12, 44-45, 50-51.

⁴² Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 126-130, 146-150, 152-157.

cooperation between connected citizens and media companies is becoming increasingly ubiquitous. For example, arguing in favour of moving past the use of collaboration as a Web 2.0 buzzword signifying an idealized egalitarian relationship, Adam Hyde and his co-authors have foregrounded how, conversely, the depth and intensity of collaborative relationships within this new social media environment can vary widely.⁴³ Similarly, addressing the collaborative creativity currently emerging in the twenty first century between fans and the creators and owners of contemporary media franchises, Derek Johnson has stressed the need to revisit the past understanding of collaboration as a relationship of complicity with the enemy.⁴⁴ From this perspective, he conceives of the collaborative relationships between fans and media corporations as one of enfranchisement because it acknowledges how seemingly free networks of collaborative production and relatively autonomous forms of creative subjectivity do not completely exist in opposition to more hierarchical modes of industrial production and have been integrated within the strategies of capitalism.⁴⁵ Contributing to these debates about the political significance of digitally enabled media collaborations, this dissertation's eventual analysis of *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut* will build on Hyde and Johnson's interventions to foreground the power relations that persist within the Web 2.0 forms of online collaboration embodied by such media crowdsourcing projects as well as the complicity of user participants within them.

Aside from being influenced by the above interventions and contributing to the same debates, this dissertation will also engage with current discussions within digital media studies about the political economy of Web 2.0 platforms, the meaning of the concept of platform, and the relationship between control and agency on the Internet. Part of a movement towards a more critical analysis of various types of platforms by the contributors of MIT's Platform Studies series like Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort along with scholars like Marc Steinberg and Dal Yong Jin,⁴⁶ the work of Tarleton Gillespie and José van Dijck, for instance, resists the dominant understanding of platforms like YouTube as neutral facilitators for participatory user creativity;

⁴³ Adam Hyde et al., "What is Collaboration Anyway?," in *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg (New York: New York University, 2012), 60-62.

⁴⁴ Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries* (New York: New York University, 2013), 198.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 199, 229.

⁴⁶ See Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 145-150; Marc Steinberg, "Platform Dominance, Contents Strategies," ARTHEMIS invited lecture, Concordia University, February 7, 2014; Dal Yong Jin, "The Construction of Platform Imperialism in the Globalization Era," *Triple C*, 11.1 (2013): 145-172, <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/viewFile/458/446>.

instead, they characterize them as being shaped by the cultural, technological, and economic contexts and power relations to which they are connected and by their architectural choices and rules.⁴⁷ Moreover, Gillespie even criticizes YouTube's representation as a neutral platform for users, marketers, and creators for eliding the tensions that exist between them.⁴⁸ For her part, van Dijck describes Web 2.0 platforms as microsystems composed of dynamic components that shape and are part of a larger ecosystem of connective media and analyzes them in terms of their architecture, user activity, content, ownership status, business models, and forms of governance.⁴⁹ Echoing an argument by Burgess and Green and partially informed by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and De Certeau's conception of everyday life,⁵⁰ her work also resists political economy and digital media theory's occasional structural and technological determinism by characterizing the strategies, rules, architecture, and discursive meaning of platforms as being mutually constituted by user tactics.⁵¹ Complementing Terranova's autonomist understanding of late capitalism's interdependent relationship with and flexible control of the agency embodied by free labour,⁵² van Dijck's alternative conception of the dynamic and deeply interconnected relations between the adopted strategies of social media platforms and user tactics also parallels other contemporary characterizations of the inter-connectedness of freedom with control and the forms of flexible control present within the regulatory architecture of a digitally networked environment by media studies and legal scholars like Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, and Julie Cohen.⁵³ Influenced by the work of de Certeau like van Dijck, Cohen, for instance, describes the everyday tactics of online users as situated, dynamic, and playful reactions to the regulatory structures, strategies, and cultural patterns that

⁴⁷ José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6-7, 27-29; José van Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," *Media, Culture, and Society* 31, no 1 (2009): 49, 54-55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098245>; Gillespie Tarleton, "The Politics of Platforms," *New Media and Society*, 12.3. (2010): 352-353, 358-360, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>.

⁴⁸ Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms'," *New Media and Society* 12.3. (May 2010): 358.

⁴⁹ van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 21, 28.

⁵⁰ Burgess and Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, 61; van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 26-28, 32-34; van Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," 45-46, 49, 54-55.

⁵¹ van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 6, 19-20, 128-129.

⁵² Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2004), 98-130.

⁵³ Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 50, 76-78; Wendy Hui-Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber-Optics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 1-2, 3, 6-11, 25, 30; Julie E. Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 6-15.

shape but are never fully determined by them, thus according these tactics some degree of relative autonomy within these circumstantial constraints.⁵⁴ This dissertation's critical analysis of online user participation and its relation to the structuring effect of over-arching platform strategies and decisions will be indebted to van Dijck and Cohen's combined reformulation of this activity as a tactical form of play existing within the parameters established by the online environment in which it occurs and by various cultural institutions as well as interacting with the strategies adopted to create and enforce these limits.

A Critical Approach to the Analysis of Web 2.0 Media Platforms and Practices

Although this dissertation's critical analysis of online user-driven media practices and the Web 2.0 discourse surrounding them will build on — and be influenced by — the above interventions and concepts found within the scholarly study of contemporary media, whether digital or not, its theoretical foundation will rely, in part, on Michel Foucault's intervention in debates about how power forms within society and the function of discourse, governance, and discipline in its reproduction. For instance, its critical analysis of the power relations in which the online users participating in a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem are situated, like Schäfer's earlier contribution, will appropriate his understanding of an apparatus:

.... a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions - in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements."⁵⁵

Using this concept, this dissertation's examination of Web 2.0-based media platforms, practices, and projects will uncover the power relations being formed by the media apparatus surrounding them, which is composed of: utopian discourse and claims; various strategies and decisions by corporate and social actors; copyright legislation; and the chosen architectural features and policies of online platforms for user content distribution and collection. Moreover, its analysis of the supporting role of Web 2.0 discourse within this apparatus will also be highly indebted to Foucault's recognition of how discourse forms and reinforces power relations,⁵⁶ but also how it

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*, 55, 262.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books,

constructs subject positions that promise greater autonomy to individuals and thus compel them to voluntarily participate in exploitative systems that disempower them.⁵⁷ Furthermore, echoing Banks' own Foucauldian vision of contemporary forms of management, this dissertation will situate Web 2.0 discourse as part of a softer neoliberal mode of governmentalized management that compels citizens to participate in similarly exploitative capitalistic systems through the discursive construction and encouragement of an entrepreneurial form of creative subjectivity and then attempts to control the increasingly valued form of flexible, playful, and relatively autonomous cultural labour which it embodies and produces.⁵⁸ However, drawing on Foucault's repeated acknowledgement of the possibility for subjects to resist the production of unequal power relations through discourse or other means,⁵⁹ it will also acknowledge the tactical responses and resistance of certain creative users to the unequal power relations cultivated by the apparatus of control strategies currently emerging within a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem and the neoliberal mode of flexible management it represents.

Aside from being influenced by the theoretical work of Foucault, this dissertation will also draw on interventions within political economy debates from the autonomist school of Marxism or interventions influenced by it like Terranova's seminal work. In particular, it will draw upon Hardt and Negri's description of the social factory and Empire's real subsumption of labour as entailing a shift from Foucault's initial restriction of the direct disciplining of labour to institutional enclosures to Gilles Deleuze's society of control wherein the more flexible management of labour extends beyond them within society.⁶⁰ In their view, the parasitical mode of capitalistic control known as Empire, rather than constraining it, seeks to include and channel the broader and commonly shared form of social production embodied by the "immaterial labour" and the "common" of the multitude — additional autonomist concepts that will also

1980), 119.

⁵⁷ Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, 42-43, 46-47, 53, 55, 58, 61, 64. For a concise examination and description of Foucault's mode of discourse analysis with its key conceptual terms and how it relates to his conception of knowledge's role within the formation of power, see Stuart Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and Discourse," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, eds. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2001), 72-81.

⁵⁸ Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, 43, 47, 51-52, 64, 72-73, 80- 82, 87-90, 93.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Volume I, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 100-101; Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 142.

⁶⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 22-25, 255-256, 364-365.

appear intermittently within a few of this dissertation's chapters.⁶¹ According to Hardt and Negri, immaterial labour refers to labour that creates “immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response.”⁶² It is also defined by them as entailing a cooperation between subjects and a networked model of production.⁶³ More importantly, autonomist writers from Hardt, Negri, and Terranova to Maurizio Lazzarato ultimately present it as a constituent force that drives capital, is capable of resisting it partly through its production of social life and new subjectivities, and creates an excess of value that can not be fully incorporated by it.⁶⁴ The common, on the other hand, is said to be the somewhat autonomous result of the immaterial products created by the multitude and to create subjectivity and social life along with the same excessive amount of value.⁶⁵ Echoing the seminal intervention of Terranova and the critical digital media scholarship influenced by it, this dissertation's critical analysis of user-driven online media practices will draw on this autonomist narrative of the social factory linked to Empire when detailing the similar extension of the cultural industries into the wider social realm of online user participation— a change remarked upon by Schäfer himself as stated earlier — but also when describing the flexible control and channeling of this now dominant type of cultural and affective labour and its commonly shared products, whether by creative users themselves, professional artists, or media corporations.

However, while not all forms of user-driven labour analyzed within this dissertation's chapters will fully adhere to every quality associated with Hardt and Negri's definitions of immaterial labour and the common or reflect them, a few of them addressed in its second and third sections will be characterized in relation to a slightly broader understanding of these concepts that — like the Terranova's notion of free labour or Côté and Pybus's concept of "immaterial labour 2.0," which includes the labour that creates "general cultural content" found

⁶¹ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 61-62, 211, 344-345, 359-361, 398-399.

⁶² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 108.

⁶³ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 294-295, 366-367, 402, 410-411; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 66.

⁶⁴ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 356-358, 361, 402, 406, 410; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, NY: The Penguin Books, 2005), 64-67, 350.; Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, 94, 152-153, 155-156; and Maurizio Lazzarato, “From Capital-Labour to Capital-Life.” *Ephemera* 4, no. 3 (2004): 201, <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/4-3lazzarato.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), viii-x, 135-136, 139-141, 151, 176-177, 282-283, 299-300, 303.

within Web 2.0 platforms⁶⁶ — acknowledges the less ephemeral media products that result from their communicative dimension. This dissertation's understanding of the creative and cultural labour of users currently dominating our twenty first century online media ecosystem and being flexibly incorporated within its emerging economies will also differentiate itself from the tendency of scholars like Coté and Pybus to characterize immaterial labour in terms of an exaggerated shift towards a cooperative realm of social production and away from an individualizing disciplinary mode of control. Even Hardt and Negri have suggested that, within the contemporary and highly networked world of Empire, the (self)disciplining of individuals has simply expanded beyond the confines of institutions to produce more hybrid subjectivities.⁶⁷ Similarly avoiding this narrative of a radical break with the disciplinary dimension of Foucauldian apparatuses, Kylie Jarrett has argued that new "individual techniques of power" like the participatory user interactivity afforded by such Web 2.0 platforms still disciplines individuals into inhabiting the idealized, flexible, and liberated subjectivity that is encouraged within Web 2.0 discourse and, in the process, renders them subject to a soft form of governmentality that supports neoliberal capitalism and its distinct systems of power.⁶⁸ This argument echoes Chun's own framing of networked computers as a "neoliberal governmental technology" whose architecture can construct empowered forms of subjectivity within their users and integrate the resulting interactions within a system where they can be profitably mapped.⁶⁹ Building on these recent attempts to uncover the political economy of a digitally networked media ecosystem and the capitalistic paradigms of power supporting it, this dissertation's critical and political-economic examination of user-driven online media practices will also unite some of the above autonomist concepts with past Foucauldian notions of disciplinary power. It will achieve this goal by approaching Web 2.0 platforms and projects as digital enclosures — Andrejevic's concept — that are part of a larger Foucauldian apparatus composed of various discursive claims and strategies which seek to produce a hybrid, flexible, and creative neoliberal subject within their users and then flexibly guide and channel the labour that results to the

⁶⁶ Coté and Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0: MySpace and Social Networks," 90.

⁶⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 329-332.

⁶⁸ Kylie Jarrett, "Interactivity is Evil! A Critical Investigation of Web 2.0," *First Monday*, 13.3 (March 3rd 2008). <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/2140/1947>

⁶⁹ Wendy Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 7-9.

primary benefit of the owners and managers of social media platforms like YouTube, various corporate interests tied to the creative industries, and media crowdsourcing projects.

The Intersection, Circulation, and Function of Affect and Discourse during Web 2.0

However, another central intervention of this dissertation will be to engage in the current conversation about whether or not present regimes of power are predominantly post-hegemonic and driven by affect or they still need to be legitimated through hegemonic discourse as asserted by the proponents of post-Marxist and Foucauldian critical theory. Contributing to this debate is Jon Beasley-Murray's 2003 article "On Posthegemony" in which he draws on Hardt and Negri and describes the decline of ideology and the post-hegemonic shift away from conscious discourse to affect.⁷⁰ Likewise, often drawing on Brian Massumi's affect theory and autonomist thought, the work of other scholars like Nicholas Thoburn, Scott Lash, and Patricia Clough would also often describe this movement away from the hegemonic and ideological realm of representation and discourse towards a more intensive, ontological, and flexible regime of power akin to Deleuze's society of control — a regime that is now heavily marked by the modulation of affect and productive communication.⁷¹ Contrary to the minimization of ideological discourse and hegemony's role in legitimating power argued by such theorists analyzing affect and culture, this dissertation's analysis of Web 2.0 discourse will illustrate how affect and discourse, as important elements of an apparatus emerging in tandem with our user-driven online media ecosystem, actually intersect to support a neoliberal capitalistic regime of power. Akin to the way Raymond Williams detects the presence of a structure of feeling within literature or Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton perceive an affect-driven expression of emotion online as a legible "*discursive* manifestation,"⁷² this discursive analysis will deduce affect's driving presence within the passionate utopian discourse about the Internet in the 1990s and within idealistic rhetoric about Web 2.0 phenomena in the present. This dissertation's reconciliation of affect and discourse also has its foundation in alternative theories of affect constructed by scholars ranging from Garde-Hansen and Gorton to Ruth Leys, Margaret Wetherell, Martin Mueller, Zizi

⁷⁰Jon Beasley-Murray, "On Hegemony," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 22.1 (2003): 118-120.

⁷¹ Nicholas Thoburn, "Patterns of Production: Cultural Studies After Hegemony," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24.3 (2007): 79-86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075959>; Scott Lash, "Power After Hegemony: Cultural Studies in Mutation?," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.3 (2007): 56-62, 65-67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075956>; Patricia T. Clough, "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25.1 (2008): 17.

⁷² Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton, *Emotion Online: Theorising Affect on the Internet*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

Papacharissi, and Ann Gibbs. These theorists importantly criticize and undermine the separation of discourse from affect often perpetuated by other theorists while demonstrating how discourses, beliefs, and ideas — whether communicated via media or not — can be driven by affective investment and desire or solidified by them as well as illustrating how, along with circumstances infused with discursive meaning, they can function as carriers of affect that can: change or reinforce one's affective predispositions; link individuals to each other and their surroundings; and cause the evocation and reproduction of a specific type of affect within a particular person.⁷³ Highlighting the interconnection of affect and discourse within contemporary regimes of power, others scholars like Yannis Stavrakakis and Kylie Jarrett have demonstrated how discourse, with affect, co-constitutes hegemonic socio-political orders, ideologies, subjects, objects, capitalistic relations of production, and structures supporting the latter.⁷⁴ Informed by these alternative conceptions of affect's relation to discourse, this research project's critical analysis of utopian rhetoric about the Internet in the 1990s — which will precede its more central examination of Web 2.0 discourse — will argue that it is infused and driven by the passionate affect of its more idealistic proponents. Following from this claim, it will then show this rhetoric to reflect an emerging structure of feeling that optimistically articulates digitally networked and novel media technologies with an affectively charged and highly attractive promise of cultural empowerment, autonomy, and communal and global unity. Moreover, this project's subsequent analysis of some of the most celebratory claims present within discourse about Web 2.0 phenomena like blogs, social media platforms, and crowdsourcing will show them to be similarly infused with the affect of their proponents while being deployed to communicate an affectively

⁷³ For instances of this problematization of the tendency to separate affect and discourse within scholarship, see Garde-Hansen and Gorton, *Emotion Online: Theorising Affect on the Internet*, 24, 33; Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A critique," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Spring 2011): 458, 468-469; Margaret Wetherell, "Affect and Discourse - What's the Problem? From Affect as Excess to Affective/Discursive Practice," *Subjectivity*, Volume 6, Issue 4 (December 2013): 351, 355, 364, <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2013.13>; Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*, (London: SAGE, 2012), 19-20, 156; Martin Mueller, "Text, Discourse, Affect and Things," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, eds. Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne Sharp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate publishing Company, 2013), 61; Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3; Anna Gibbs, "Affect Theory and Audience," in *The Handbook of Media Audiences*, ed. Virginia Nightingale (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 255-256, 259.

⁷⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis, "Discourse, Affect, Jouissance: Psychoanalysis, Political Theory, and Aristic Practices," in *Art & Desire Seminars* (Istanbul, June 2010), 4-5, 17, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/51550231/yannis-stavrakakis-discourse-affect-jouissance->; Kylie Jarrett, "The Alternative to Post-Hegemony," *Culture Unbound*, 6 (2014): 139, 146, 148-149, 151, 154, <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v6/a08/cu14v6a08.pdf>.

charged promise of creative or expressive empowerment and fulfillment to online users, so as to stimulate a desirable affective response within them and motivate them to participate in the production of media for little to no compensation. In addition, within its analysis of specific user-driven media practices on social media platforms and of media crowdsourcing projects, this dissertation will also detail platform owners and project organizers' strategic deployment of discourse mimicking the play-based language of the medium of games or evoking the narrative content of popular media properties in order to stimulate and re-awaken the pre-existing affective connections of online fans and YouTube creators with them. This project will also demonstrate how, through its stimulation of affect, this strategic use of discourse is intended to compel online users and creators into voluntarily partnering with an exploitative Multi-Channel Network without much thought or into contributing their labour and content to such corporate entities, a social media platform, or a crowdsourcing project.

Although one way of stimulating affect-driven online user participation within this online media ecosystem is through this strategic use of discourse, it is not the only motivating influence and — as will be seen later in this dissertation — the chosen architecture and features of a Web-based media platform as well as existing online and offline media objects and their core elements can also be appropriated to provoke an affect-laden form of participatory response within an online crowd of users and potential project participants. In his own work, Richard Grusin has suggested that networked media interactions on platforms like YouTube and the circulation of affect across different media, which they often entail, are often encouraged through — and often themselves produce — the anticipatory expectation of pleasurable affective experiences and connections that are said to stem from them, but also the feedback loops they provide between individuals and their media.⁷⁵ More importantly, several of the above affect theorists such as Papacharissi, Garde-Hansen, and Gorton have foregrounded how media objects, whether existing online or not, are tools that can sustain and transmit affect — often by containing a preemptive symbolic and affective value that is in-built and waiting to be subjectively constructed by an individual — and how, as a result, these objects and those who create them can explicitly rely on past affective attachments to some of their key elements in an attempt to encourage a desired

⁷⁵ Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 99, 103-104, 125, 128-130, 133-134.

audience action.⁷⁶ Complementing the contributions of affect theorists Anna Gibbs and Teresa Brennan who — partly indebted to late-nineteenth century crowd theory — characterize affect as being transmitted across different subjects and influencing them like a virus,⁷⁷ the recent work of scholar Tony D. Sampson would construct a similarly crowd-based theory of affective contagion within the realm of online social media networks and detail how capital seeks to control this networked and media-based form of affective transmission by preplanning affective experiences that can suggest a feeling to a connected crowd of users and result in a desired act from several of them.⁷⁸ Aside from helping to foreground several of the other factors that can motivate online user participation beyond the attractive promises of Web 2.0 discourse, these theories about affect's relation to media and its potential transmission within an online media environment will also guide this dissertation's critical examination of how popular media objects — games, Japanese animation, or any specific media text with a large enough fanbase — in combination with the emotions and ideas they evoke within the communities they cultivate can produce or reproduce affective reactions and emotional relationships within creative online users and fans. These affective relationships will then be shown to drive creators to produce and circulate content on Web 2.0 platforms and constitute alternative distribution and production spaces for it. These above theories will also inform this dissertation's critical analysis of how the affection for specific media objects can also be strategically deployed and exploited by various corporate entities in order to further stimulate the participation and collaboration of a connected crowd of online users within particular media crowdsourcing or crowdfunding projects centered around a popular media property without offering any substantive form of extrinsic compensation or input in exchange.

While relying on the above affect theories as a foundation for its own understanding of the intersection of affect with discourse and media and its attempted modulation within communicative capitalism's neoliberal apparatus of flexible control strategies, this dissertation's analysis will also specifically foreground the affective dimension of contemporary manifestations of cultural labour and its capacity to resist the above apparatus' strategies or,

⁷⁶ Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, 21-22; Garde-Hansen and Gorton, *Emotion Online: Theorising Affect on the Internet*, 4, 41-42.

⁷⁷ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 3, 6; Gibbs, "Affect Theory and Audience," 264.

⁷⁸ Tony D. Sampson, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 143, 144-150, 157, 161-162, 166-167, 170-171.

conversely, to be actively channeled by it for profit and promotion. Viewing it as an incarnation of the immaterial labour that is becoming increasingly central to late capitalism, Hardt and Negri have constructed the term affective labour in order to highlight how the former often entails the "creation and manipulation of affect."⁷⁹ Drawing on this concept, a few of this project's case study analyses will examine how the affect-laden relationships cultivated by the labour of online users like fanvid creators, gameplay commentators, and media crowdsourcing participants are often encouraged and channeled for potential profit and exposure through several particular strategies by the corporate entities populating and surrounding a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem. Supported by the autonomist concept of affective labour, several of these case studies will also acknowledge how contemporary incarnations of cultural labour by online users — in addition to creating, transmitting, and modulating affect — are often themselves partially motivated by past affective responses that have solidified into persistent emotional attachments and desires — traits that, as has already been suggested, are often strategically exploited by various media corporations and the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects. However, rather than perpetuating a totalizing narrative of complete affective capture, this dissertation will retain the contingent potentiality and constituent power associated with Hardt and Negri's notion of immaterial labour, but also with affect in general — especially within affect theories indebted to the work of Massumi. It will acknowledge this lingering constituent power in order to illustrate how the users producing this labour are often compelled by affect to tactically respond to the strategies of control and commodification emerging within a Web 2.0 ecosystem through the continued online circulation of their amateur media, various forms of resistance and pressure, and the creation of alternative spaces for media distribution, production, and funding.

Methodology of Dissertation

In order to determine the degree to which online users are empowered within Web 2.0-based media platforms and projects and by the neoliberal economy of communicative capitalism that drives them, this dissertation will adopt various methods influenced by the theoretical foundation outlined above. For instance, as applied to the examination of literature about Web 2.0 phenomena and the Internet as well as the related practice of crowdsourcing, one core method deployed will be discourse analysis informed by post-Marxist critical and cultural theory and Foucault's recognition of the discursive dimension of a disciplinary apparatus and of power.

⁷⁹ Negri and Hardt, *Empire*, 292-293.

Through its investigation of texts cutting across a variety of cultural fields from the 1990s and the early- to mid-2000s to the present, this analysis will reveal the dominant claims and associations articulated with the Web and its 2.0. incarnation within this period. It will also detail how the idealistic claims connected to this rhetoric implicitly encourage online users to inhabit a neoliberal form of creative subjectivity more likely to freely contribute media content to a given Web 2.0 platform, project, or corporate entity. Moreover, it will also reveal how these utopian assertions mask the asymmetrical power relations that often emerge between these users and the other stakeholders involved with these platforms, projects, and companies and, in combination with the aforementioned encouragement of user participation within them, contribute to their reproduction. It will also be used in other chapters to uncover the specific articulation of the above discourse with particular Web 2.0 platforms or projects and to supplement this dissertation's second key methodology: case studies. Through the analysis of representative case studies and the chosen design elements of the Web-based platforms to which they are connected, the dissertation will uncover the type of power relations, participation, and collaboration forming as a result of the interactions of the creative users found in a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem with its apparatus of strategies, policy choices, platform decisions, and laws — an apparatus intended to enable the flexible control of their labour and the accumulation of its products. Lastly, in the second chapter's examination of YouTube-based fanvid parodies, a few email interviews with past fanvid creators are undertaken in order to communicate the original material context, non-profit values, and transformative creativity informing the later manifestation of fanvid parody on the social media platform.

Through the adoption of this hybrid methodology, especially its case study approach, this dissertation will reveal how specific user tactics and their differing values interact with the networks of residual and emergent media corporations and media forms associated with a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem. It will also demonstrate how creative online users and media crowdsourcing participants in particular are both constrained and afforded a certain degree of autonomy within this environment and its surrounding apparatus of control. Due to its examination of Web 2.0. discourse and the contingent interactions of creative users with the control strategies and decisions adopted by certain media corporations, the research project will offer a clearer portrait of the power relations being cultivated within this ecosystem. It will

provide a more detailed understanding of the discursive and regulatory apparatus supporting these relations and of the lingering autonomy afforded to these users by the former.

Chapter Summaries

The assortment of methods listed above will be deployed to analyze Web 2.0 discourse and user-driven online media practices within several chapters spread across three sections and a conclusion. More specifically, the lengthy introductory chapter making up the first section will detail and analyze some of the key claims embedded within discourse about emerging user-centric online phenomena and practices associated with Web 2.0 paradigm or the Social Web, especially as expressed within popular commentary, book-length manifestos, and academic texts about these changes from the early to mid-2000s. Furthermore, it will examine how this discourse often promises — to the large number of online users from all over the world who participate within Web 2.0 platforms and spaces — a novel, neutral, and democratizing foundation that can substantively include them within the realm of media production and distribution. This chapter will also foreground the elements this discourse shares with the utopian rhetoric about the Internet and Cyberspace in the 1990s, so as to illustrate how their novel repackaging within it allowed it to strategically circumvent the growing criticism directed towards this earlier rhetoric from the mid-1990s onwards. Moreover, this chapter will characterize the more utopian incarnations of Web 2.0 discourse as the extension of a structure of feeling initially reflected within this prior rhetoric. Lastly, its analysis will underscore how this discourse promises an empowered and affectively satisfying form of neoliberal creative subjectivity — a promise intended to entice individual users into voluntarily offering their free labour and media to Web 2.0 platforms and projects for the primary benefit of their managers and owners. Through these potential effects, this discourse will be said to contribute to a neoliberal system of flexible control wherein the distribution of power and value is frequently unbalanced.

The two chapters composing the dissertation's second section, however, will focus on two specific user-driven media practices that have become dominant on YouTube. For instance, while tracing their origins and precursors dating back to the 1980s, this section's first chapter will analyze the highly visible production and distribution of non-profit fanvid comedies on Google's platform by Western fans of Japanese animation who appropriate and creatively transform a wide variety of animated texts. While foregrounding how YouTube's own discourse of user

empowerment attracts the participation of users like these fans, the analysis of this participatory creative practice will foreground the asymmetrical power relations that often form between them, Google, and media corporations within this platform. It will then reveal how these power relations are the result of an apparatus of control that, while involving the above discourse, entails design strategies and policy decisions intended to balance the platform's profit-driven need for greater amounts of user-generated content with the requirements of U.S.-based intellectual property law and its competing need to enforce copyright and satisfy the proprietary interests of established media companies and corporate partners. For instance, the vulnerability and disempowerment of these fanvid creators resulting from their lack of control over the actions of YouTube's heavily automated copyright enforcement and content filtering system, Content ID — a system that is the product of YouTube's desire to appease the demands of certain corporate interests — will be shown to undercut its image as an inclusive intermediary for the empowerment of all creative users and to reflect the biases that shape its seemingly neutral design. Furthermore, this chapter's case study analysis will illustrate how the often tense relationship of YouTube and its user-driven media practices to the media forms and proprietary strategies of mass media industries undermine its image as a radically independent alternative. In addition, it will highlight how, because their labour is driven by a different value system and affective disposition than that of YouTube and these industries, fanvid creators frequently tactically resist the above apparatus by constructing alternative distribution platforms and novel means to fund them and their content. Nevertheless, it will also underline how, while retaining their non-profit ethos, the appropriation-based practices of YouTube-based fanvid creators often hold a more interconnected relationship with media corporations and money than that suggested within scholarly conceptions of transformative fan creativity and online user activity.

As a counterpoint, this section's second chapter will analyze the more significant rise in popularity of the user-driven online practice known as gameplay commentary — captured video footage of gameplay from copyrighted games and its synchronization with voice-over commentary by players and fans — in the mid-2000s on YouTube. Through its analysis, this chapter will demonstrate how Web 2.0 discourse and the reformulation of labour as play often present within the games industry and social media platforms affectively compel gameplay commentators into contributing the products of their labour to YouTube. It will also reveal how such commentators tactically interact with an apparatus of strategies composed of: the above

discourse; YouTube's platform features and processes chosen to enforce copyright law and monetize user-generated content; and the profit-driven and promotional strategies of game publishers and MCNs. This analysis will unveil how users like gameplay commentators are afforded, amidst this apparatus, the capacity to monetarily benefit from Google and other media companies's greater inclusion and flexible control of their playful, appropriation-based, and affect-driven labour and its products. It will also illustrate how the frequently beneficial situation described above, while supporting a neoliberal mode of capitalistic control, complicates the Marxist conception of labour as a coerced resource or the view of fan or user practices as predominantly non-commercial. In spite of this, this case study analysis will still reveal how this seemingly financially empowering and inclusive apparatus places participatory online users like gameplay commentators in an unequal power relation with various media interests — a relationship within which they do not receive a proportional amount of the benefits stemming from their labour or much control over its products, their commodification, and YouTube's structural conditions. Lastly, it will also foreground how the competing values and goals held by commentators originating from YouTube and the forum-based Let's Player communities of websites like Something Awful differently affect the production and content of their videos while often driving them to adopt alternative forms of monetization and distribution.

The last section will include three chapters that will critically examine a media-related practice that, conversely, tends to be initiated by corporations and professional artists or creators rather than users and is more focused on the crowd-based and collaborative traits of the Web 2.0 paradigm: media crowdsourcing and its aggregation of user-generated content. The first chapter will undertake a discourse analysis of popular and academic commentary about crowdsourcing and its media incarnation that will contextualize it as sharing similar utopian claims as Web 2.0 discourse and highlight its continuity with past theories of the crowd. Furthermore, it will assert that — through its affectively charged promise of creative empowerment, inclusion, and communal membership via participation — crowdsourcing discourse draws attention away from the frequent emergence of hierarchical power relations between participants and the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects. Simultaneously, it also encourages these participants into voluntarily offering their free labour to such projects.

The case study analysis within the second chapter will illustrate how this discourse replicates itself within commentary about YouTube's *Life in a Day* (2011) — an incarnation of

what this chapter will term the "global documentary mosaic" genre of media crowdsourcing — but also within its campaign in order to encourage greater user participation. It will examine how an apparatus composed of decisions, strategies, and discourse undertaken by *Life in a Day's* organizers flexibly manages and channels the labour of its participants for the benefit of various corporate interests and how its embodiment of a flexible neoliberal mode of capitalistic control undercuts the more utopian claims of crowdsourcing discourse and the project. The last chapter will analyze the 'remake' genre of media crowdsourcing as embodied by the *Star Wars Uncut* project (2009-2014) and its remakes of *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977) and *Star Wars Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). However, while examining a few of this genre's precursors and the shaping influence of platform design decisions within them and *Star Wars Uncut*, its analysis will highlight the potential for greater inclusion and collaboration afforded by the crowdsourced remake due to its intention to reproduce an existing media text with a relatively fixed structure. In addition, it will emphasize the important function of affect-driven labour within a Web 2.0 ecosystem by revealing how *Star Wars Uncut's* organizers take advantage of the affect of *Star Wars* fans in order to encourage them to undertake free labour and produce large amounts of user content for their own benefit. Furthermore, it will reveal how the *Star Wars Uncut* project's second phase *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* became integrated into the commercial strategies of the franchise's copyright owners and how it does not afford fans much input over its final form, rules, or its conditions for participation, nor many extrinsic benefits.

Following these three sections, the conclusion revisits how the labour and affect of users is encouraged and flexibly controlled in a manner that often predominantly benefits the various corporate stakeholders connected to Web 2.0. platforms and projects. It also reiterates the increasing ways in which participating online users and creators tend to be disempowered within a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem. As a final example of this tendency, the conclusion will briefly examine the power asymmetry that tends to emerge between established project creators and crowdfunding backers when the former use the platform Kickstarter to channel, control, and convert the labour and affect of fans into funds and publicity. This strategy shifts the burden of financial risk onto users, but, in exchange for their pledges, fails to accord them any significant amount of control within media crowdfunding campaigns or the projects after they are successfully funded. This conclusion will also foreground media practices, platforms, and projects that exemplify a tactical resistance to the flexible strategies of control often associated

with the above ecosystem or which embody an alternative to some of the more hierarchical and exploitative forms of online media participation described within this dissertation's case studies. Lastly, it will outline areas of research and methods that could build on this project's political-economic analysis of this Web 2.0-based media ecosystem and shed further light on it.

Through this political-economic and critical-theoretical analysis of discourse and representative media practices related to the Web 2.0 paradigm, this dissertation will create new knowledge about this twenty first century online media ecosystem and function as a corrective against the idealistic conceptions of online participation and citizen empowerment present within many of the past and contemporary texts found within digital media and Internet studies. Contributing to this same goal, it will also reveal the flexible and neoliberal apparatus of capitalistic control that has surfaced within this participatory online media environment and its effects by foregrounding the specific strategies and decisions undertaken by established and emergent media corporations to control the users within this ecosystem and by highlighting how they frequently situate users within unequal relations of power. By exposing this media apparatus, it will provide concrete answers to its central research questions about the character of the control strategies surfacing within this ecosystem, the exact paradigm of capitalistic control that shapes them, and the type of relationship that exists between these strategies and the tactics of online users. It will also produce new information about the potential and limits of online participation and collaboration and about the specific constraints and affordances that tend to be associated with it. More specifically, it will unearth the actual degree of autonomy afforded to users by Web 2.0 media platforms and projects while demonstrating the capacity for the affect-driven and often free and immaterial labour of users to resist and challenge the control strategies of these platforms and projects. It will also reveal how this same labour can constitute alternative spaces, practices, and projects that partially avoid the hierarchies, inequality, and unequal power relations and value exchanges that frequently dominate this contemporary online environment. This dissertation's critical analysis of less well known online manifestations of user-generated media production such as YouTube-based fanvid parodies and gameplay commentary videos as well as the 'global documentary mosaic' or 'crowdsourced remake' genres of media crowdsourcing will help provide a more comprehensive portrait of the participatory media ecosystem and economies that are emerging online during the twenty first century and supporting neoliberal capitalism and its increasingly flexible mode of social control. Lastly, the

critical examination of these novel and under-researched media objects like fanvid parodies, gameplay commentary, collaborative documentaries, and amateur-produced remakes will, by itself, provide new knowledge about their continuing evolution and their past and present characteristics within and outside of the above online media environment.

Section I:
Web 2.0 Discourse

Chapter One: An Examination of the Origins of Web 2.0 Discourse and its Core Claims

In order to understand how utopian rhetoric about the Web 2.0 paradigm's democratizing potential masks and supports the relations of power, hierarchies, and inequality that affect the participatory examples of online user production addressed in the introduction and throughout the rest of the dissertation, it is necessary to detail and critically analyze many of the affectively charged discursive claims and promises being articulated by its proponents with the Web 2.0 paradigm and its various social incarnations — within a heterogeneous assortment of texts cutting across several fields from cultural commentary in newspapers, books, and magazines to the work of scholars. Moreover, to avoid perpetuating Web 2.0 discourse's narrative of transformative change, it is also essential to counter the image of radical novelty attached to this paradigm and trace the contextual origins of many of its more idealistic claims to earlier passionate commentary about the Internet and the emerging structure of feeling reflected within it. This structure of feeling entails an affect-driven articulation of networked communication technologies like the Internet with a utopian narrative of personal and communal empowerment through the supposedly global inclusion and democratization of socio-political and cultural participation that they afford to average citizens. By examining the context out of which Web 2.0 discourse emerged, this chapter will illustrate how, while acknowledging the rise of online platforms that depend on user activity, it strategically repackages earlier celebratory claims about the Internet following the damage caused to its image by the dotcom collapse in 2000 and by the growing criticism of the democratization rhetoric surrounding it from the mid-1990s onwards.

Dating back a few decades, this longstanding idealistic narrative of social empowerment associated with digitally networked communication technologies, according to scholar Matthew Hindman, rests on a utopian conception of democratization or "digital democracy" that associates the Internet with amplifying "the political voice of ordinary citizens," "redistributing political influence," "broadening the public sphere," "increasing political participation," "involving citizens in political activities that were previously closed to them," and "challenging the monopoly of traditional elites."⁸⁰ Throughout this chapter, a similar conception of Web-enabled democratization will be demonstrated to extend to the subject of cultural production with many sources of commentary championing the potential of the Internet and its Web 2.0 incarnation to democratically empower a greater number of citizens to create and distribute their own media

⁸⁰ Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5-6.

outside of the monopolistic control of the mass media industries. As suggested by Dean in the introduction, this discursive articulation of the Internet with notions of democracy, inclusion, and participation detailed by Hindman and the materialization of such ideas within communication technologies and platforms by global capitalism gives shape to communicative capitalism — a paradigm of capital reliant on such rhetoric and its actualization in service of a neoliberal political-economic system.⁸¹ Moreover, communicative capitalism's utopian rhetoric of democratization, which is inherently tied to new communication technologies, also depends on very specific fantasies of "abundance," "wholeness," and "unity" that are rooted in a boundary-transcending, liberating, and highly inclusive conception of the "global" Internet — an understanding which also artificially accords a greater sense of significance and importance to the media contributions of online users.⁸² Within this chapter's discourse analysis, the proponents of Web 2.0 phenomena and its precursors will be shown to associate many of the same utopian ideas and claims with the Internet and its twenty first century 2.0 incarnation. Taken together, these claims tend to perpetuate: 1) an assumption of neutrality that masks the biases of Web 2.0 platforms, the deployment of power within them, and the shaping influences of established media industries on their architectural and policy decisions; 2) the above vision of a transformative and novel form of global inclusivity, citizen empowerment, and democratized participation within the realm of political and cultural production; and 3) a utopian fusion of progressive rhetoric about community participation, expanded collaboration, and the power of the crowd with a neoliberalist and libertarian celebration of personal empowerment, independence, and autonomy. Moreover, within this chapter, several of the more prominent discursive claims about the Internet in the 1990s and, eventually, about Web 2.0 phenomena will be revealed as the product of a particular discursive and production context — one which reflects and supports a flexible neoliberal form of governmentality that is partially emerging in response to an authentic desire by citizens and labourers for a less alienating degree of creative autonomy and participation within the realm of economic and cultural production. The discourse analysis present within this chapter along this dissertation's following case study analyses of YouTube-based user-driven media practices will also underline how the commentary of early cyber-evangelists and of the later proponents of various Web 2.0 trends — which often promises the

⁸¹Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 123; Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 2, 17, 22-23.

⁸² Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 42-45.

satisfaction of this growing desire for greater creative agency via different forms of online participation — supports the communicative incarnation of neoliberal capitalism sketched by Dean as well as the capitalistic interests of the owners and corporate entities controlling and inhabiting Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube. More specifically, it serves the interests of this new paradigm of capitalism by encouraging and profitably channeling the creative forms of user participation currently emerging within the twenty first century's digitally networked economies and minimizing the power relations and inequality that often ensue following this attempt to harness this activity's value. As will be seen more visibly in the rest of the dissertation's chapters, user-driven online media platforms and projects often strategically deploy, for similar reasons, the more utopian claims of Web 2.0 discourse, especially its promise of creative empowerment and this desire's satisfaction. However, in anticipation of those case studies and in order to explain the seeming effectiveness of Web 2.0 discourse, this chapter's discourse analysis will acknowledge how the affectively charged and attractive character of its promise of creative empowerment — in other words, the capacity of discourse to tap into existing affect or evoke it — partially accounts for why online users are motivated to believe its more idealistic claims and voluntarily contribute their labour and media, for little to no extrinsic compensation, to Web 2.0-based media platforms and enterprises like YouTube and its crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day*.

The Origins of Web 2.0. Discourse

Despite its seeming novelty, many of the most celebratory claims of Web 2.0 discourse were beginning to emerge with greater regularity within earlier commentary about the Internet, giving shape to a structure of feeling uniting network-based communication technologies with an empowerment narrative centered around the democratization and expansion of public participation within politics and culture. As defined by Williams, a structure of feeling is a type of emergent and historically distinct feeling, form of thinking, or feature of social experience that is not yet defined as a dominant belief — although it can still integrate existing beliefs as part of this experiential quality — and which manifests as a change or a living and affective practical consciousness.⁸³ In his estimation, it is thus an almost pre-emergent "structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and in what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions."⁸⁴ According to him, structures of feeling

⁸³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 131-133.

⁸⁴ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 134.

are often felt within the semantic realm of a period's literature.⁸⁵ In her own work on the formation of affective publics within digital networks, Papacharissi has defined structures of feeling as feelings that, while organized, can still fluidly connect a diverse range of people and structural relations as well as cultivate spaces where particular narratives can be expressed and within which individuals can affectively situate themselves through a variety of expressive media practices.⁸⁶ Even though similarly utopian claims can be felt in earlier discourse about past forms of media prior to the Internet,⁸⁷ the above structure of feeling is connected to the popular and academic discourse from the two decades prior to the crash of the dot-com bubble and specifically articulates network-based communication technologies — which were described using terms like Cyberspace and computer-mediated communication — with a similar promise of transformative empowerment and greater freedom through the democratization of socio-political and cultural participation and the heightened degree of connectivity that they supposedly afforded.

The groundwork for this later structure of feeling could be felt as early as the 1970s within the work of popular commentators writing about the potential democratizing impact of emerging technological trends such as computer-mediated communication, but also, occasionally, within a few scholarly texts on the same subjects. For instance, while occasionally striking a cautionary tone, the late futurist Alvin Toffler in his books *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980) suggested that technologies like digitally networked computers could democratically empower marginalized citizens by enabling them to disrupt existing hierarchical social systems or make their own political choices within the more direct system of democracy that, he claims, such tools would afford.⁸⁸ Similarly, the more widely distributed 1995 book of former president of PBS and NBC news Lawrence Grossman, *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age*, characterized interactive telecommunications networks as democratically empowering the public in the future to participate in the construction

⁸⁵ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133-134.

⁸⁶ Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, 116, 118, 135.

⁸⁷ Recognizing the longstanding presence of such utopian assertions about new media technologies before discourse about Cyberspace, see Nicholas Jankowski and Martine van Selm, "The Promise and Practice of Public Debate in Cyberspace," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 150.

⁸⁸ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 476-477; Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1980), 445-6.

of the laws and policies that govern them.⁸⁹ Likewise, in his various essays for the *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine* in the mid-1990s, Michael Strangelove characterized the Internet as an unmediated, democratizing, and non-hierarchical space that enables citizens to inhabit a more liberated and uncensored mode of self and to participate more substantively in a new bidirectional and global form of mass communication and create media outside the control and constraints of businesses and governments.⁹⁰ Contemporaneous to the perpetuation of concepts like teledemocracy by writers like Theodore Becker from the early 1980s onwards within magazines, books and journals,⁹¹ this discursive articulation of computer-mediated communication and other new forms of telecommunications media with a transformative conception of democratic empowerment for citizens would also continue to spread within the literature of this period. For example, the growing association of the Internet specifically with notions of participatory democracy, a more inclusive public sphere, and greater freedom and empowerment for citizens would become more visible throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as numerous literary texts and sources of commentary — intended for a range of different academic and non-academic audiences — began to debate the political potential of new media technologies and introduce terms complementing this notion of teledemocracy like electronic democracy, cyberdemocracy, and digital democracy.⁹² For example, contributing to such conversations within a 1991 article, scholar Peter Dahlgren would partially support the above narrative of network-enabled democratization by positively associating new media, networked

⁸⁹ Lawrence K. Grossman, *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 3-4, 6, 48-49, 148.

⁹⁰ Michael Strangelove, "The Internet as Catalyst for a Paradigm Shift." *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine*. 1.8 (December 1, 1994). <http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1994/dec/shift.html>; Michael Strangelove, "The Internet, Electric Gaia and the Rise of the Uncensored Self," *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine*, 1.5 (September 1, 1994). <http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1994/sep/self.html>; Michael Strangelove, "Cyberspace and the Changing Landscape of the Self," *The Geography of Consciousness*, 3 (1994). Accessed March 21st, 2017. https://w2.eff.org/Net_culture/Consciousness/geography_of_consciousness.article

⁹¹ For examples of texts using such terms, See Theodore Becker, "Teledemocracy: Bringing the Power Back to the People," *The Futurist*, 15.6 (Jan 1981): 6-9; Michael Malbin, "Teledemocracy and its Discontents," *Public Opinion*, (Jun/Jul 1982): 58-59; F. Christopher Arterton, *Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1987).

⁹² See David S. Broder, "Electronic Democracy," *The Washington Post*, Aug. 30, 1987, p. C7; Costis Toregas, "Electronic Democracy," *Public Management*, (Nov. 1989): pp. 2-3; Jeffrey B Abramson, F. Christopher Arterton, and Gary R. Orren, *The Electronic Commonwealth: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1988), 46-49, 54-58, 166, 277-279; Howard Rheingold, "Electronic Democracy," *Whole Earth Review*, (Summer 1991): 4-13; Tom Dworetzky, "Electronic Democracy," *Omni Magazine*, Feb. 1992, p. 27; Roza Tsagarousianou, Damian Tambini, and Cathy Bryan, eds. *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities, and Civic Networks*. (New York: Routledge, 1998).; Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk, eds. *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000).

computers, and communication technologies with the "emergence of a plurality of dynamic alternative public spheres."⁹³ Moreover, media theorist Mark Poster would also partly contribute to this growing image of networked communication and the Internet as democratizing forces by foregrounding the latter's political potential to enable the self-constitution of the subject and approximate the features of a democratically beneficial public sphere.⁹⁴ Such texts strongly articulate digitally networked and interactive communication technologies with an empowering, transformative, and inclusive form of socio-political and cultural participation for citizens.

Nevertheless, according to scholar Fred Turner, the type of digital utopianism about computer-mediated communication present within this structure of feeling — while only achieving a greater amount of visibility in later decades — would originate within the left-leaning New Communalist ideas promulgated from the 1960s onwards by Stewart Brand, the founder of the network forum and magazine launched in 1985 and known as the Whole Earth Electronic Link (WELL) and the *Whole Earth Review* (WER), respectively, and the several prominent members who would embrace them.⁹⁵ As described by Turner, New Communalists held beliefs that unified the progressive vision of the counterculture emerging from the 1960s onwards with the ideas about entrepreneurship, cybernetics, and collaboration that appeared within militaristic American research culture — together, they tended to frame computer-enabled communication networks as an egalitarian tool for both individual and collective liberation and empowerment that could counter institutional forms of power.⁹⁶ Embodying a communitarian ethos, they also conveyed a utopian vision of the social possibilities and potential power of networked labour.⁹⁷ These New Communalist ideas would also complement Marshall McLuhan's contemporaneous utopian conception of the global village that will supposedly be brought forth by the arrival and continued expansion of electronic and networked media technologies — an optimistic vision of the future wherein electric technologies will connect humanity and empower it.⁹⁸ Furthermore, according to Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, McLuhan's ideas would

⁹³ Peter Dahlgren, "Introduction," in *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*, edited by Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1991), 14.

⁹⁴ Mark Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere," in ed. David Porter, *Internet Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 201-218.

⁹⁵ Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3-9.

⁹⁶ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 4-6, 9, 216, 244-245, 253, 256.

⁹⁷ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 161, 169.

⁹⁸ See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of the Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Corte Madera, CA:

also be one of the key influences on the belief of techno-utopians after the 1960s that the "convergence of media, computing and telecommunications" will produce an electronic agora that will empower average citizens to express themselves more freely.⁹⁹ Demonstrating their joint impact on early discourse about the Web, New Communalist and McLuhanian ideas would eventually be felt within the writings of prominent WELL members and of commentators significantly associated with or heavily covered by the techno-libertarian magazine about the cultural, economic, and socio-political impact of emergent media technologies, *Wired*. As noted by Turner, many contributors to *Wired* during the 1990s would similarly characterize networked computers and the Internet as tools for individual and collective empowerment while perceiving them and their users as either embodiments of a non-hierarchical, decentralized, and collaborative society or as forces that can cause the latter to become a reality.¹⁰⁰ The contemporaneous work of Vincent Mosco on the digital sublime and the idealistic myths surrounding the concept of cyberspace as well as the later interventions of scholar Thomas Streeter with regard to the romantic and countercultural character of early computer and Internet rhetoric from *Brand* to *Wired* both cover much of the same territory.¹⁰¹

Further exemplifying the influence of Brand's utopian ideas about the Web while also contributing to their wider circulation, Cyberlibertarian activist John Perry Barlow — a founding member of the Electronic Frontier Foundation launched in 1990, a significant participant of WELL, and a contributor to *Wired* — would characterize, within his own work, the supporting concept of Cyberspace coined by science fiction novelist William Gibson in the 1980s as a communal, decentralized, and non-hierarchical realm where citizens could become more independent.¹⁰² In an article published in 1991 for the *Communications of the ACM* journal about the need to civilize and shape this new environment, he still specifically presents it as a liberating "electronic frontier" populated by nomadic cyberpunks and a "new world" that offers "more opportunities than there will ever be entrepreneurs enough to exploit" and where "old concepts of

Ginkgo Press, 2003 [1964]).

⁹⁹ Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," *Science as Culture*, 6.1 (1996): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09505439609526455>.

¹⁰⁰ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 208, 209.

¹⁰¹ See Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004), 17-53; Thomas Streeter, *The Net Effect: Romanticism, Capitalism, and The Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 44-68, 119-137.

¹⁰² See Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 172-174.

property, expression, identity, movement, and context" no longer apply.¹⁰³ Likewise, in a later 1994 article about the unique character and challenges of the information economy for *Wired*, he continues to characterize Cyberspace as a liberating frontier space.¹⁰⁴ Building on this portrait, his 1996 manifesto "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" passionately proclaims Cyberspace to be independent and resistant to governmental control and foreground how its inclusive character empowers citizens to express themselves and circumvents past hierarchies:

We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.

We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.¹⁰⁵

This conception of the Internet as a liberatory space and the passionate affect driving Barlow's belief in it would also appear within the early 1990s work of fellow WELL contributor, occasional *Wired* writer, and digital media commentator and former *WER* editor Howard Rheingold. Despite eventually recognizing these technologies' potential to enable toxic behaviour and to be co-opted by corporations and the state within his popular 1993 book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* and its revised edition,¹⁰⁶ Rheingold's 1993 text, similar to Barlow, still emphasizes how computer-mediated communication (CMC) can empower citizens to participate more deeply within a democratic society, form life changing virtual communities, and challenge current monopolies on media by a hierarchical elite.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, he reinforces this narrative of inclusivity and democratization by highlighting the benefits of the diverse knowledge of a large group of geographically dispersed individuals, who are now networked together and included within the process of information creation by CMC.¹⁰⁸ This passionate belief in the empowering potential of these

¹⁰³ John Perry Barlow, "Electronic Frontier: Coming into the Country," *Communications of the ACM*, Vol. 34. No. 3. (March 1991): 19.

¹⁰⁴ John Perry Barlow, "The Economy of Ideas," *Wired*, March 1st 1994, <https://www.wired.com/1994/03/economy-ideas/>

¹⁰⁵ John Perry Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, February 8th, 1996, accessed July 13th, 2016, <https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence>

¹⁰⁶ Howard Rheingold, "Disinformacracy," in *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 276-300; Howard Rheingold, "Rethinking Virtual Communities," in *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2000), 323-392.

¹⁰⁷ Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, First Edition (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 4-15, 14-15.

¹⁰⁸ Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, First Edition, 56.

technologies for all citizens would also be further spread within digital media proponent Nicholas Negroponte's 1995 book *Being Digital* — a collection of many of his written columns for *Wired* throughout the 1990s. Within it, he argues that, through the Internet, individuals from all over the world will be able to fully participate in the realm of cultural expression and be their own media broadcasters and distributors.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, he optimistically concludes within this text that the digital age embodied by the Internet can have "decentralizing, globalizing, harmonizing, and empowering" effects for citizens.¹¹⁰ This discursive articulation of digitally networked media technologies and the ecosystem they cultivate with notions of greater cultural, social, and political autonomy and empowerment for citizens and the affect and emotional passion driving this utopian belief — which can be seen and felt within the texts of Barlow, Rheingold, and Negroponte — lie at the core of the emerging structure of feeling that would come to achieve a greater degree of visibility and dominance during the twenty first century following the introduction and popularization of the Web 2.0 paradigm. In his own work, Streeter has himself examined the gradual association of the Internet from 1992 to 1996 with a notion of romantic individualism and the sense of empowerment and freedom this conception promises and then linked it to Raymond Williams' concept of the structure of feeling.¹¹¹

Further supporting this structure of feeling throughout the 1990s was the affectively tinged utopian claims and beliefs about the Internet espoused within the publications of *Wired's* founding executive editor and former *WER* editor Kevin Kelly and the independent work of several other past contributors and interview subjects for the magazine like Esther Dyson and George Gilder. For instance, in his 1995 book *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines*, Kelly contributed to this narrative of network-enabled empowerment by idealistically framing the Internet as an anarchic and free space for users resistant to external control.¹¹² Similarly, in his 1998 book *New Rules for the New Economy*, this overtly positive portrait of the Internet persists and is reinforced through an array of utopian claims. More specifically, within this text, he claims that the inclusivity, plentitude, and unique powers enabled by the open communication networks of what he calls the New Economy collectively create an increase in opportunities and

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 176, 224.

¹¹⁰ Negroponte, *Being Digital*, 229.

¹¹¹ See Thomas Streeter, "The Internet as a Structure of Feeling, 1992-1996," *Internet Histories: Digital Technology, Culture, and Society*, 1.1-2 (2017): 79-89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2017.1306963>.

¹¹² Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines*, (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), 33, 598.

value for citizens.¹¹³ He associates these digital networks with an idealized notion of decentralization and a geographically indeterminate form of inclusivity.¹¹⁴ He presents the economy cultivated by these networks as enabling a decentralized form of ownership and allowing virtual communities to flourish and connect with a global pool of members.¹¹⁵ He argues that this same economy unleashes the power of amateurs, disrupts past relationships between producers and consumers, and amplifies new ones by encouraging consumers to have an expanded role in the creative process.¹¹⁶ Lastly, he also emphasizes the potential power and benefits of a networked swarm of individuals and their collective intelligence — a notion initially conceived by cultural theorist Pierre Levy a year earlier.¹¹⁷ Contributing to the more utopian incarnations of early Internet discourse, Kelly's celebratory claims about the personal and communal empowerment afforded by a networked economy and the enthusiastic affective passion driving and being communicated through them — shaped as they are by the New Communalist ideas and passion of Brand and the writers he influenced — would continue to circulate within the work of other writers linked to the techno-utopian environment cultivated by *Wired* during the mid- to late 1990s including Esther Dyson's 1997 text *Release 2.0.: A Design for Living in the Digital Age*. Here, Dyson also characterizes the Internet as offering citizens and communities all over the world a chance to redefine and govern themselves.¹¹⁸ She claims that, due to its decentralized and transnational character, it gives them the power to express themselves and undermine centralized authorities while offering them a level playing field.¹¹⁹ More concretely, she argues that it shifts power towards citizens, consumers, and small organizations by enabling them to have more control and opportunities including the opportunity to act and become creators without assuming many of the costs usually associated with this role.¹²⁰ She also asserts that the Internet affords the creation of communities not restricted by geographical boundaries — whether driven by commercial profit or not — and allows people to freely participate within them.¹²¹ Ultimately, Dyson views the Internet as a tool that could

¹¹³ Kevin Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy: 10 Radical Strategies for a Connected World*, (New York: Viking, 1998), 19, 39-46, 145, 156.

¹¹⁴ Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy*, 65, 73, 94-96.

¹¹⁵ Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy*, 103-105, 156-157, 159.

¹¹⁶ Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy*, 105, 118, 121-122.

¹¹⁷ Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy*, 16, 18, 130.

¹¹⁸ Esther Dyson, *Release 2.0. : A Design for Living in the Digital Age* (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 2, 6.

¹¹⁹ Dyson, *Release 2.0. : A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, 6, 8-9.

¹²⁰ Dyson, *Release 2.0. : A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, 8, 36, 77, 278, 280, 284-285.

¹²¹ Dyson, *Release 2.0. : A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, 9, 32, 36, 44.

include and empower a larger range of global citizens within the political realm and help them "accomplish their own goals in collaboration with other people."¹²² As argued by Turner, her deployment of New Communalist ideas would support the techno-libertarians and New Right politicians of the 1990s who were appropriating them to celebrate the decentralization and benefits that the Web could afford businesses.¹²³ Complementing this effect, in his 1990 book *Life After Television*, conservative techno-utopian George Gilder would assert that the telecomputing enabled by advances in microelectronics resists and weakens various forms of monopoly or hierarchy including the centralization of mass media production within the hands of a few institutions by promoting creativity and enabling every reception point within a network to be a media channel, thus expanding individualism, equality, and the participation of citizens within a democracy.¹²⁴ Even in his later 2000 book *Telecosm*, Gilder again characterizes digital networks as shifting power away from corporations to customers, liberating the latter from past hierarchies, and enabling them to collaborate with citizens all over the world and create and broadcast media.¹²⁵ This idealistic conception of digitally networked media technologies like the Internet — which is perpetuated by the structure of feeling increasing felt within the published commentary of former WELL members and *Wired* contributors like Barlow, Rheingold, Negroponte, Kelly, Dyson, and Gilder — would continue to spread within other literary texts during this period, partially due to its attractive promise of a transformative form of creative, socio-political, and economic autonomy and participation to citizens. In addition to the attractive ideological pull of this empowering narrative for all citizens, its increasingly wider circulation within North American culture and media over the years would also be partly propelled by the significant and often contagious affective component that drives the optimistic discourse of these early proponents and its communication — a transmittable form of affective passion which can often be felt through such discursive texts' implicitly or explicitly expressed emotional desire for a greater form of agency within the realm of politics and of cultural and social production

Outside the writing of commentators shaped by the techno-utopian ideas emanating from figures associated with Brand's WELL forum or *Wired*, another significant late 1990s text

¹²² Dyson, *Release 2.0. : A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, 35.

¹²³ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 216, 222-223, 232, 249.

¹²⁴ George Gilder, *Life After Television*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 32, 41, 48, 52, 54, 116, 126.

¹²⁵ George Gilder, *Telecosm: How Infinite Bandwidth Will Revolutionize Our World*, (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 249, 252.

contributing to the above structure of feeling's growing association of digitally networked media technologies like Internet with a transformative form of citizen empowerment and freedom — and, eventually, a similar belief within Web 2.0 discourse — is Pierre Levy's widely read 1997 English translation of his scholarly theoretical book *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace* (1994). This particular text would also contribute to this emerging discourse about the Internet — particularly through its central concept of collective intelligence which would later come to be appropriated by non-academic techno-utopian writers like Kelly who similarly believed in the significant social benefits of the networked hive mind.¹²⁶ It would also, as will be illustrated later, re-appear within the work of early Web 2.0 proponents like Tim O'Reilly. With this concept, Levy claims that Cyberspace and the technologies shaping it can provide people with the ability to combine their knowledge to form intelligent communities and empower more individuals to participate more fully within society and deal with shared issues on an ongoing basis.¹²⁷ Moreover, echoing Rheingold's belief in the Web's capacity to cultivate empowering virtual communities, Levy's translated text idealistically asserts that they also can enable the formation of multiple independent communities and empower its members and groups to communicate laterally beyond hierarchies and fixed categories and enhance themselves.¹²⁸ As with many of the above contributors to early Internet discourse, Levy's idealistic association of the Web and the collective intelligence it supposedly affords with a notion of communal empowerment is tied to a complementary belief that they jointly enhance the freedom, powers, and qualities of being — which he associates with independent individuals and groups — while enabling the latter to freely engage in dynamic expressions and activities that can enrich their lives and construct new meanings and identities.¹²⁹ These optimistic claims are more muted than other digital media proponents because Levy's more critical text acknowledges, to a greater degree, that the empowering benefits they discuss are a potential —and not a guaranteed — outcome of citizens properly taking advantage of the collective intelligence afforded by Cyberspace. Nevertheless, they still support the formation of the previously described structure

¹²⁶ In order to discover how Kelly specifically conceives of this networked hive mind and its benefits, see the second chapter "Hive Mind" from Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995).

¹²⁷ Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (New York: Plenum Trade 1997), 61, 63, 65.

¹²⁸ Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, 54-55.

¹²⁹ Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, 13, 67-68, 80, 160, 183, 206, 250-251.

of feeling and its association of the Web with an image of personal and collective empowerment through the democratization of participation within the socio-political and cultural realm.

Delving into the emergence of this structure of feeling within the early Internet discourse of the 1990s in particular, it becomes apparent that, as argued by Turner in his seminal text, the passionate response of the above commentators to the potential of digitally networked media technologies influenced these writers to associate such technologies with a less hierarchical, harmonious, and communal alternative that democratically empowers citizens and groups *and*, conversely, a networked form of neoliberal economic life that also enables more individuals to create and be part of arrangements, commercial or otherwise, that accord them more autonomy.¹³⁰ Through their concept of the Californian Ideology, Barbrook and Cameron in a 1996 article of the journal *Science as Culture* would describe a similar ideological formation that, like the New Communalist vision outlined above, similarly characterized networked digital technologies as emancipating its users and fused a New Left concern for social liberalism with the New Right focus on economic neoliberalism.¹³¹ Turner thus correctly perceived the affect-driven New Communalist ideals of writers like Kelly, Dyson, and Rheingold as legitimating a post-Fordist neoliberal paradigm of production that increasingly relies on outsourcing and more autonomous forms of precarious labour.¹³² More importantly, by cultivating an individualistic conception of power through its cyber-libertarian vision of networked individuals as being relatively independent from the control of state or corporate institutions, he is also right to argue that this utopian framing of the Web offers very little means of confronting unequal distributions of power and resources.¹³³ It can also result in a denial of the material costs and context linked to networked forms of production — a form of denial that renders the believers of this celebratory rhetoric significantly more vulnerable to the social forces of the historical context in which they exist and their choices.¹³⁴ By minimizing social concerns about unequal power relations and the real constraints and flaws associated with the Internet, this more idealistic discourse about its empowering potential in the 1990s and the emerging structure of feeling it reflects would ultimately give shape to a variation of Jodi Dean's neoliberal paradigm of communicative

¹³⁰ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 238, 247.

¹³¹ Barbrook and Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," 44-72.

¹³² Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 203, 204, 216.

¹³³ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 261.

¹³⁴ Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 259, 262.

capitalism and its materialization of a capitalistic mode of control marked by flexible networked labour and management. In the rest of this dissertation, however, this flexible approach to organizing online user labour will be characterized as being closer to Hardt and Negri's autonomist conception of labour under Empire than the totalizing vision of complete capture embedded within Dean's own conception of communicative capitalism. More importantly, in the following section, the structure of feeling that would create the foundation for this emerging form of communicative capitalism — specifically, an increasingly visible articulation of digitally networked media technologies and the ecosystem they cultivate with a promise of greater citizen empowerment and liberation — will be demonstrated to be heavily indebted to both the ideological rhetoric of neoliberalism and the more flexible mode of creative management increasingly found within a neoliberal information economy since the 1960s. Both the ideological and economic dimensions of the neoliberal form of communicative capitalism that drives a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem — as will be argued in this chapter and throughout this dissertation — emerge out of the shift from industrial capitalism in the pre- and post-war period to a new paradigm of capitalistic production and management described varyingly with terms such as post-industrialism, post-Fordism, and the network society. As illustrated in the next section, this change in production and the accompanying rhetoric about labour has been extensively detailed by various cultural theorists and political economists from the 1970s onwards and they provide the context for the affective desire for greater participation that grounds the above structure of feeling about the democratizing potential of networked digital media technologies like the Internet.

Neoliberal Production, Management, and Rhetoric as Context for Internet Discourse

For instance, following the translated work of French sociologist Alain Touraine analyzing it in the early 1970s,¹³⁵ the emergence of a post-industrial society driven by information, flexible forms of cultural creativity, and the service industry — which is described within Daniel Bell's 1973 book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* — provided an importantly influential context for the previously detailed utopian vision of the Web as a realm or tool that enhances citizen participation and freedom. For instance, Bell argues that post-industrial capitalism was defined materially and discursively by a

¹³⁵ See Alain Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts, and Culture in the Programmed Society*, trans. Leonard F.X. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971).

growing rejection of bureaucratic constraints, but also by a countercultural desire for greater participation, control, and self-enhancement for individual citizens that existed in tension with more technocratic and rational organizational forms and social structures.¹³⁶ Further echoing the idealistic promise of greater freedom for citizens contained within early Internet discourse is what Bell viewed as the utopian rhetoric surrounding this post-industrial shift — rhetoric which asserted that, within an information economy, the identity and lives of citizens could now more easily be "remade or released" and that the "constraints of the past" once placed upon them will "vanish with the end of nature and things."¹³⁷ Later in the 1970s and 1980s, central contributors to the Regulation School of political economy such as Michel Aglietta, Alain Lipietz, and Danièle Deborgne would also acknowledge this movement away from more hierarchical and Fordist forms of work management and towards alternative and hybrid approaches to capitalistic organization enabled by emerging technologies, which involve offering a greater degree of flexibility, autonomy, input, and responsibility to labourers and channeling the resulting productivity.¹³⁸ Likewise, in his 1989 text *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey emphasizes the increasing flexibility and focus on individualism being introduced within capitalistic modes of production from the 1970s onwards.¹³⁹ Moreover, synthesizing a range of different perspectives on this shift, Harvey would even associate notions of flexible labour, decentralization, entrepreneurialism, individualism, and strategic management with the de-industrialization, immateriality, and symbolic capital attached to this new post-Fordist and information-driven paradigm of capitalism.¹⁴⁰ He even argues that this paradigm, at the level of production, empowers a privileged section of the labour force specializing in creativity and an increase in both opportunities and difficulties for the flexible working class who are now harder to fully control.¹⁴¹ Importantly, he acknowledges how discourse about the flexibility afforded by this new post-Fordist mode of capitalism can mislead workers into thinking that corporations will now readily adopt these beneficial flexible relationships, thus disincentivizing them from

¹³⁶ Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 364-365, 477-480.

¹³⁷ Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, 488.

¹³⁸ Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience*, translated by David Fernbach, (London: NLB, 1979), 122-130, 167-168, 385; Alain Lipietz and Danièle Deborgne, "New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation: Some Implications," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 6.3. (September 1988): 267-278.

¹³⁹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Political Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 147-150, 155-156, 159, 170-171.

¹⁴⁰ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Political Change*, 338-342.

¹⁴¹ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Political Change*, 186-187.

collectively struggling to achieve them by themselves.¹⁴² While providing the foundation for the communicative paradigm of capitalism recognized by Dean, this literature's description of this post-industrial shift's supposedly liberating benefits for labourers along with this movement's actual enabling of more creative autonomy and flexibility for workers within the production process and its accompanying utopian management rhetoric would strongly inform the similarly idealistic promise of greater and more autonomous participation for citizens that would come to be associated with digitally networked media technologies like the Internet and the new type of economy to which they were contributing.

After the above flexible forms of production and organization started to appear more prominently within the U.S. from the 1960s onwards alongside idealistic management rhetoric encouraging them, descriptions of these supposedly substantive changes and the growing contribution of digitally networked media technologies to them continued to surface during the 1990s and 2000s, often significantly complementing the contemporaneous vision of the Internet's liberatory potential for individual citizens, which was described in the prior section. For example, American sociologists Jerald Hage and Charles H. Powers in their 1992 book *Post-Industrial Lives: Roles and Relationships in the 21st Century* underline how post-industrial labour is defined by a capacity to flexibly respond to changing circumstances and the citizens who engage in it are afforded a greater amount of agency and control.¹⁴³ Complementing this assertions, in his 1995 book *The End of Work*, author Jeremy Rifkin describes how, due to the greater latitude given to labourers within the post-Fordist mode of production enhanced by new information technologies, knowledge workers share a greater degree of power with business managers.¹⁴⁴ More importantly, in his seminal book *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), sociologist Manuel Castells details the emergence of flexible forms of labour and management within a technologically-driven "network society" and their potential benefits for workers and businesses.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, echoing the previously discussed work of Hardt, Negri, and Terranova, fellow autonomist scholar Nick Dyer-Witheford similarly describes, throughout his book *Cyber-*

¹⁴² Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Political Change*, 189-190.

¹⁴³ Jerald Hage and Charles H. Powers, *Post-Industrial Lives: Roles and Relationships in the 21st Century* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 11, 13, 198-199.

¹⁴⁴ Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 96-101, 175, 183.

¹⁴⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 154-155, 157-160, 264-267.

Marx (1999), a new mode of capitalism enhanced by digitally networked communication technologies that creates a social factory that attempts to encourage, harness and flexibly control the wider social productivity and creativity of workers and connected citizens.¹⁴⁶ Even autonomist theorist Franco Berardi, in his text *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (2009), has recognized a new mode of capitalism emerging after the 1970s that attempts to further incorporate and convert the creativity and individualistic desire for self-empowerment of modern labourers into value while ideologically framing the labour involved as being more autonomous.¹⁴⁷ However, Berardi is quick to point out how the attractive neoliberal values of freedom articulated with this new capitalistic environment reflect the social factory's new mode of control, particularly its attempt to encourage and flexibly control — rather than restrict and completely direct — the independent intellectual products of worker subjectivities.¹⁴⁸ Commenting on similar changes within capitalism, less scholarly writers like Andrew Ross, in his 2003 book *No-Collar* (2003), would also detail the emergence of a workplace within the new type of economy cultivated by digitally networked technologies — particularly within Silicon Valley. According to him, this new emerging workplace encourages more creative and playful forms of labour and embraces a greater degree of self-management among workers, but also discursively promises various affectively satisfying and liberating forms of self-fulfillment and reinvention through the enhanced autonomy of production which it affords to labourers.¹⁴⁹ He also importantly foregrounds how the new types of creative labour emanating from this economy are increasingly being idealized for the creative qualities and autonomy typically associated with independent artists while being positioned as more liberating counter-cultural counterparts to the labour seen under more bureaucratic forms of organization.¹⁵⁰ The increasing embrace and rhetorical promise of greater creative autonomy and flexibility for labourers seen within the late capitalistic economy from the 1970s onwards — which is increasingly dependent on networked digital technologies and addressed by all of the above writers — helped shape the discursive and production context that would inform the early passionate narrative of Internet-enabled

¹⁴⁶ Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 4, 64, 67-69, 71, 81-86, 91-93, 99, 118, 121-122, 127, 228, 237 .

¹⁴⁷ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotexte, 2009), 88-89, 96, 116, 132-134, 166, 178-180.

¹⁴⁸ Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, 187-192.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 9-10, 15, 17-20, 209.

¹⁵⁰ Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*, 26-27, 34-35, 50, 144, 247.

empowerment perpetuated in the 1990s as well as the flexible form of management and utopian rhetoric associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm and, by extension, with the contemporary mode of communicative capitalism it supports and embodies.

Throughout the rest of this dissertation, however, the idealistic and affect-driven discourse about the Internet emerging during the 1990s — which was outlined in the previous section — will be more specifically characterized as reflecting the neoliberal dimension of the post-industrial mode of late capitalism described by the above authors and of its supporting discourse. For instance, Ross's later 2009 book *Nice Work If You Can Get It* would correctly assert that the aforementioned rhetoric about creative liberation circulating within this economy — albeit a partial result of alienated labourers' genuine desire for greater creative autonomy from the 1970s onwards — has also come to reinforce the dominance of neoliberal capitalism and the precarity that tends to accompany it.¹⁵¹ According to Harvey in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), neoliberalism as an American form of capitalism relies on a utopian discourse about individual freedom in order to legitimate and justify itself, but it also depends on the actualization of this idealistic notion of autonomy within the labour force in order to re-establish the foundation for capital accumulation and the restoration of the power of economic elites.¹⁵² For example, Harvey argues that, beginning in the 1970s alongside the developments detailed in the previous paragraph, idealistic claims about the beneficial and liberating character of increased flexibility within the production process for labour became a key part of the discourse that legitimated the flexible form of accumulation that is an integral part of neoliberalism.¹⁵³ Complementing this contention, in his book *Neoliberal Culture* (2016), Jim McGuigan has conceived of neoliberal capitalism as involving a generational structure of feeling that offers an attractive image of selfhood and is attached to a "cool" rhetoric of producerly consumption — a type of image and rhetoric which incorporates the disaffection of citizens and compels them into inhabiting an attractive and seemingly empowering form of individualization that nevertheless supports this mode of capitalism's growing integration of precarious and creative forms of labour.¹⁵⁴ This process of flexible control described by McGuigan is highly

¹⁵¹ Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*, (New York: New York University, 2009), 5, 44-48.

¹⁵² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5, 19, 38, 40-42.

¹⁵³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 53, 75-76, 183, 188.

¹⁵⁴ Jim McGuigan, *Neoliberal Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 16, 19, 22-23, 26-28, 35, 37-43, 131.

indebted to the characterization of capitalism's 'new spirit' seen within the previous work of French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello.¹⁵⁵ However, although affect-driven discourse about the Internet from the 1990s onwards often does emphasize its potential to empower communities and Web 2.0 rhetoric will be shown to make similar claims, its articulation of digitally networked media technologies with transformative forms of empowerment and liberation — itself signaling a pre-emergent structure of feeling — also focuses, whether implicitly or explicitly, on the empowered individual citizen in a manner that reflects and bolsters the individualistic logic of the cool neoliberal discourse about the empowered productive self described by McGuigan and the complementary generational structure of feeling that he claims it reflects. Shaped by and supporting the above shift to a post-industrial form of neoliberal capitalism and the rhetoric serving it, the affectively charged discourse of early Internet proponents signals the emergence of a structure of feeling that would ultimately be the foundation for later Web 2.0 rhetoric and its support of communicative capitalism's neoliberal encouragement and incorporation of the often individualistic productive subjectivities of connected citizens and their social products.

The Rising Critique of Internet Utopianism

However, the utopian vision of networked communication technologies like the Internet constructed by its early proponents would increasingly be undercut due to the growing amount of criticism directed towards it within academic scholarship and other literary texts from the mid-1990s onwards as well as due to the emergence of catastrophic historical events like the dotcom crash at the end of the decade — shifts and events that eventually forced some of the most idealistic claims within early Web discourse to be resurrected and rebranded during the early twenty first century into a new form under the Web 2.0 paradigm. While some of this growing criticism of this perception of networked communication technologies as inherently

¹⁵⁵ Within the work of Boltanski and Chiapello, this new spirit of capitalism entails the similar co-option of an artistic critique of the alienating qualities of industrial labour — often within firm management literature — from the 1960s to the 1990s in order to promise a decentralized and less hierarchical mode of management within corporations that would offer a more liberating degree of autonomy, flexibility, and control to a larger number of wage-earners — a utopian promise that would legitimate and support the flexible type of management ultimately adopted. For information about this incorporation of this critique within late capitalism and management literature, see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2007), 37-38, 64-68, 68-76, 80-99, 201. Elsewhere, in this same text, the authors would further detail how this promise would be deployed within discourse about this new capitalistic paradigm to attract individuals into willingly participating within it and its more flexible mode of management while mobilizing them undertake actions that support it. See Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 346, 419, 425, 430-432, 459.

democratizing and empowering forces started to surface earlier in the 1980s,¹⁵⁶ the majority of it began to appear in the mid-1990s following the rise of the concept of the digital divide after the reports undertaken by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration during the period.¹⁵⁷ The emergence of this term would resist the utopianism embedded within this growing discourse about the Internet as well pre-existing concepts associated with it like the information superhighway. With the occasional help of such concepts, an increasing number of articles within anthologies and books cutting across various fields began to: criticize this utopian vision of a Web-enabled democratization of participation or expanded public sphere; foreground the lingering divides, hierarchies, and inequality associated with this new medium; and critically engage in the ongoing debates about the democratizing potential of networked communication technologies.¹⁵⁸ For instance, a 1996 issue of *Media, Culture & Society* would be dedicated to

¹⁵⁶ For instance, see F. Christopher Arterton who, in his 1987 work *Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy*, would criticize technological determinism and argue for the importance of guiding our social use of telecommunications technology in order to have the desired democratic effects while also recognizing the real inequalities of access or participation that could stem within this environment due to technological cost or weaker degrees of activity. F. Christopher Arterton, *Teledemocracy: Can Technology Protect Democracy*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1987), 26-27, 203-204.

¹⁵⁷ Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, "Defining Digital Citizenship," in *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁵⁸ For examples of this growing corpus of critical literature about Cyberspace and the Web in the 1990s, see Brian D. Loader, "The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology, and Global Restructuring," in *The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology and Global Restructuring*, ed. Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-18; Brian D. Loader, "Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society," in *Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society*, ed. Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3-16; Trevor Haywood, "Global Networks and the Myth of Equality: Trickle Down or Trickle Away," in *Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society*, ed. Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1998), 19-34; Mike Holderness, "Who are the World's Information-Poor?," in *Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society*, ed. Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1998), 35-56; Joe Ravetz, "The Internet, Virtual Reality, and Real Reality," in *Cyberspace Divide: Equality, Agency and Policy in the Information Society*, ed. Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1998), 113-122; Cathy Bryan, Roza Tsagarousianou, and Damian Tambini, "Electronic Democracy and the Civic Networking Movement in Context," in *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities, and Civic Networks*, eds. Roza Tsagarousianou, Damian Tambini, and Cathy Bryan (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8, 13; Roza Tsagarousianou, "Electronic Democracy and the Public Sphere: Opportunities and Challenges," in *Cyberdemocracy: Technology, Cities, and Civic Networks*, eds. Roza Tsagarousianou, Damian Tambini, and Cathy Bryan (New York: Routledge, 1998), 175-176; Edwin R. Black, "Digital Democracy or Politics on A Microchip," in *Digital Democracy: Policy and Politics in the Wired World*, eds. Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xii-xv; Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal, "Introduction: New Currents in Politics and Policy," in *Digital Democracy: Policy and Politics in the Wired World*, eds. Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-23; Michael Ogden, "Technologies of Abstraction: Cyberdemocracy and the Changing Communications Landscape," in *Digital Democracy: Policy and Politics in the Wired World*, eds. Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63-86; Bill Cross, "Teledemocracy: Canadian Political Parties Listening to Their Constituents," in *Digital Democracy: Policy and Politics in the Wired World*, eds. Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132-148; Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader, "Digital Democracy: An Introduction," in *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision-Making in the Information Age*, eds. Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3-22; Anna Molina, "Perspectives on Citizen

articles interrogating the concept of electronic democracy, analyzing the effects of networked communications technologies, and foregrounding the ways in which they do not create a more democratic society marked by equality or a deliberative public sphere.¹⁵⁹ This critical analysis of the Web's democratizing potential and the increasing commercial control of it by corporations would extend into the early 2000s,¹⁶⁰ but it would also continue past the introduction of the concept of Web 2.0 in 2004.¹⁶¹ Exemplifying this increasing critical resistance to the previously

Democratization and Alienation in the Virtual Public Sphere," in *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision-Making in the Information Age*, eds. Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1999), 23-38; Richard K. Moore, "Democracy and Cyberspace," in *Digital Democracy: Discourse and Decision-Making in the Information Age*, eds. Barry N. Hague and Brian D. Loader (New York: Routledge, 1999), 39-62.

¹⁵⁹ For instance, while including more optimistic accounts and appraisals of the potential changes enabled by new media technologies, see texts with a more skeptical and critical outlook from this issue including Lewis A. Friedland, "Electronic Democracy and the New Citizenship," *Media, Culture & Society* 18, no. 2 (1996): 185-212; Kenneth L. Hacker, "Missing Links in the Evolution of Electronic Democratization," *Media, Culture & Society* 18, no. 2 (1996): 213-232, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344396018002003>; Kees Brants, Martine Huizenga, and Reineke van Meerten, "The New Canals of Amsterdam: An Exercise in Local Electronic Democracy," *Media, Culture & Society* 18, no. 2 (1996): 233-247, <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344396018002004>; and Andrew Calabrese and Mark Borchert, "Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States: Rethinking Communication and Social Policy," *Media, Culture & Society* 18, no.2 (1996): 249-268.

¹⁶⁰ For examples of this increasingly critical analysis of the supposedly democratizing potential of the Web, see Anthony G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-23, 105-22; Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk, "What is Digital Democracy?," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 2-3; Martin Hagen, "Digital Democracy and Political Systems," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 65-66; Jan van Dijk, "Widening Information Gaps and Policies of Prevention," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 168-177, 179; Sinikka Sassi, "The Controversies of the Internet and the Revitalization of Local Political Life," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 102; Jan van Dijk and Kenneth L. Hacker, "Summary," in *Digital Democracy: Issues of Theory and Practice*, eds. Kenneth L. Hacker and Jan van Dijk (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 210, 212-213, 216, 218-219; Joseph S. Nye, "Information Technology and Democratic Governance," in *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age*, eds. Elaine Ciulla Karmack and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 7-14; Arthur Isak Applbaum, "Failure in the Cybermarketplace of Ideas," in *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age*, eds. Elaine Ciulla Karmack and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 31; William A. Galston, "The Impact of the Internet on Civic Life: An Early Assessment," in *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age*, eds. Elaine Ciulla Karmack and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 54-56; Pippa Norris, "Revolution, What Revolution? The Internet and U.S. Elections, 1992-2000," in *Governance.com: Democracy in the Information Age*, eds. Elaine Ciulla Karmack and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 71-74, 76-77; Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Mary Stansbury with Ramona McNeal and Lisa Dotterweich, *Virtual Inequality: Beyond the Digital Divide* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 1-7, 9, 33-35, 54-56, 61, 79-80, 85-89, 109-110, 116-120.

¹⁶¹ For instance, See Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation," *Political Communication*, 22.2 (2005): 151-152, 155-157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933160>; Benjamin R. Barber, "How Democratic are the New Telecommunications Technologies?," *IDP: Revista de los Estudios de Derecho y Ciencia Política de la UOC* 3 (2006), <http://www.uoc.edu/idp/3/dt/eng/barber.pdf>. [inactive], 7-10; Jodi Dean, Jon W. Anderson, and Geert Lovink, "Introduction: The Postdemocratic Governmentality of Networked Societies," in *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society*, eds. Jodi Dean, Jon W. Anderson, and Geert Lovink (New York:

described utopian rhetoric about the Internet, the work of scholars like Eric Schickler and Tony Babeo in the mid-1990s would critically conceive of networked communications technologies, not as inherently increasing political participation, but as tools that can reinforce existing hierarchies and whose flaws can outweigh their benefits.¹⁶² Elsewhere, in a 1995 article for *Body and Society*, Kevin Robins would criticize the tendency of cyber-evangelists to disconnect Cyberspace from the "real world" and the influence of its constraints.¹⁶³ A year later, Marshall van Alstyne and Erik Brynjolfsson would foreground the gaps in access to information sources and the harmful effects and inequality that could result from interactive communications media and their potential 'cyberbalkanization' of preferences and groups.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, while Barbrook later viewed the Web as beneficially cultivating gift economies,¹⁶⁵ even he and Cameron in a 1996 article of the journal *Science as Culture* highlighted the elitism and relations of domination that could still emerge from networked digital technologies in spite of the utopian rhetoric emanating from the Californian ideology.¹⁶⁶ Contributing to this argument, in a 1997 article for the *European Journal of Communication*, writer John Street would reject a view of information technologies as a neutral and voluntarily selected force that is autonomous from the realm of political power, but also paradoxically shaping it; instead, he asserts that socio-political and cultural processes and technologies shape each other and, as a result, can benefit powerful interests and produce obstacles to participation stemming from inequalities of resources.¹⁶⁷

Resisting this same vision of new telecommunications media like the Internet and their platforms

Routledge, 2006), xvi, xx-xxii; Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics: States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 52-53, 63, 75, 78-79, 108, 113, 292-293; Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 12-19, 132, 135-136, 140-142; Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, "Defining Digital Citizenship," in *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 9; Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal with Bridgett King, "From the Digital Divide to Digital Citizenship," in *Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 109, 112, 120-122.

¹⁶² Eric Schickler, "Democratizing Technology: Hierarchy and Innovation in Public Life," *Polity* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 176, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3235172>; Tony Babeo, "The Debate Over Teledemocracy." *The Sloping Halls Review* 2. (1995): 11.

¹⁶³ See Kevin Robins, "Cyberspace and the World We Live In," *Body and Society* 1, no. 3-4. (November 1995): 135-155, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X95001003008>.

¹⁶⁴ Marshall van Alstyne and Erik Brynjolfsson, "Electronic Communities: Global Villages or Cyberbalkanization? (Best Theme Paper)," in *ICIS 1996 Proceedings*, paper 5 (December 31st, 1996), p. 80, 92, 95, <http://aisel.aisnet.org/icis1996/5>.

¹⁶⁵ See Barbrook, "Cybercommunism: How the Americans are Superseding Capitalism in Cyberspace," 5-40.

¹⁶⁶ See Barbrook and Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," 44-72.

¹⁶⁷ John Street, "Remote Control? Politics, Technology, and 'Electronic Democracy,'" *European Journal of Communication* 12, no. 1 (1997): 32-35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323197012001003>.

as autonomous, neutral, and inherently democratizing tools, Benjamin Barber in the same year would similarly acknowledge how they are vulnerable to the anti-democratic privatization and homogeneous communication that often result from their powerful owners' centralizing control and monopolistic commodification processes.¹⁶⁸ In his view, they are frequently more likely to support and be shaped by existing institutional and political forces and thus reinforce longstanding inequalities.¹⁶⁹ Other theorists of digital media such as Jodi Dean and Geert Lovink from the mid-1990s onwards would continue to foreground, within their own work, how the Internet and this surrounding discourse are shaped in support of existing relations of capital, hierarchies, and interests and, thus, primarily benefit the wealthy or technologically adept while failing to afford a transformative degree of autonomy to citizens or a radically inclusive public sphere.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, media theorists like Lev Manovich, David Jay Bolter, and Richard Grusin would critique the more utopian incarnations of new media discourse while also highlighting the influence of pre-existing media forms on networked digital technologies and their continued co-existence alongside them.¹⁷¹ Beyond this body of critical literature intended for a scholarly audience, this discursive de-coupling of networked forms of telecommunication like the Internet from these utopian elements would also appear within Grossman's *Electronic Republic* — which importantly underlines the potential flaws and contingent character of these new technologies and how they are used — and other texts like John Seabrook's *Deeper: My Two-Year Odyssey in Cyberspace* (1997) with its recognition of lingering forms of exclusionary behaviour and hierarchies within Cyberspace.¹⁷² More prominently contributing to this weakening of early

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin Barber, "The New Telecommunications Technology: Endless Frontier or The End of Democracy?" *Constellations* 4, no. 2. (1997): 208, 210, 213, 215-216, 218, 223-225.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin Barber, "The New Telecommunications Technology: Endless Frontier or The End of Democracy?" *Constellations*, 4.2. (1997): 211, 219-220, 224.

¹⁷⁰ See Jodi Dean, "Virtually Citizens," *Constellations*, 4.2. (1997): 265-66, 269, 271-272, 274-275, 278, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00053>; Geert Lovink, "Introduction," *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 2, 5. Geert Lovink, "Fragments of Network Criticism," (1999) *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 167; Geert Lovink, "Cyberculture in the Dotcom Age," (2000) *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 343; Geert Lovink, "Hi-Low: The Bandwidth Dilemma, or Internet Stagnation after Dotcom Mania," (2001) *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 372; Geert Lovink, "The Rise and Fall of Dotcom Mania," (2001) *Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2002), 350.

¹⁷¹ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), 8-10, 21-26, 49-51, 69-93, 94-103, 286-333; Richard Grusin and David Jay Bolter, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999), 2-18, 50, 60-61, 74, 179-180, 180-183, 270.

¹⁷² Grossman, *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age*, 6-7, 30, 165, 170; John Seabrook, *Deeper: My Two-Year Odyssey in Cyberspace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 254-5, 260.

utopian discourse about the Internet, however, would be more accessible books like Lawrence Lessig's *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (1999) and Cass Sunstein's *Republic.com* (2001). In the former, Lessig would repeatedly recontextualize the Internet as a space regulated by various forms of constraint tied to the market, social norms, and laws, but also by its designed architecture or code.¹⁷³ In the latter, Sunstein would acknowledge the influential power that corporations wield over code and software design on the Internet and the significant power which the government enacts within this space via the regulatory protection of the private property circulating within it.¹⁷⁴ The increasingly critical outlook on the potential effects of the Internet found within this diverse literature would substantially undercut the previously mentioned structure of feeling's idealistic articulation of the Web with a transformative form of citizen empowerment and autonomy. Compounding the counter-hegemonic effects of this competing discourse was the collapse of the dot com bubble from 1999 to 2001 and its own impact on the more utopian portrait of the Internet described in this chapter.

The Emergence of Web 2.0. Discourse

However, the damage caused by this critical literary movement and this event would be substantially minimized by Web 2.0 proponents' strategic re-branding and re-imagining of the Internet in the mid-2000s — a reincarnation of the Web following the crash that Lovink has detailed in his work.¹⁷⁵ Lending further credence to Web 2.0 discourse's regenerative purpose in a 2005 blog post, technology entrepreneur Ian Davis would claim that, while Web 2.0 is an *attitude* about incentivizing participation through open-ended online services, the Web has:

.... always been about participation, and would be nothing without it. It's single greatest achievement, the networked hyperlink, encouraged participation from the start. [...] This is why I think the Web 2.0 label is cunning: semantically it links us back to that original web and the ideals it championed, but at the same time it implies regeneration with a new version.¹⁷⁶

Despite this recognition of how Web 2.0 rhetoric replicates the participatory promises of earlier Internet discourse, this re-imagining within popular and scholarly discourse from the early 2000s onwards would emphasize the radical discontinuity of the Web 2.0 paradigm with more

¹⁷³ Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 5-7, 24-25, 43-44, 67, 86, 88-89.

¹⁷⁴ Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 19, 132, 134-135.

¹⁷⁵ Geert Lovink, *Zero Comments: Bloggin and Critical Internet Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), ix.

¹⁷⁶ Ian Davis, "Talis, Web 2.0, and All That," *IanDavis.com*, July 4th, 2005, <http://blog.iandavis.com/2005/07/talis-web-20-and-all-that/>

traditional mass media and an earlier incarnation of the Web while characterizing it as a superior incarnation of the latter. In an early article on the concept of Web 2.0 for *ZDNET*, writer Russell Shaw would even criticize how it constructed a vision of a "unified movement or wave toward a better Web" that often seemed to include too large a range of online activity under its umbrella.¹⁷⁷ Echoing the idealistic discourse about the Internet that preceded and informed it, however, this all-encompassing rhetoric about Web 2.0-associated phenomena or the emergence of a new incarnation of the Web would still present these online developments as contributing to the empowerment of citizens and the inclusive democratization of participation while repackaging many of this earlier rhetoric's most utopian claims.

Initially, however, the first usage of the term "Web 2.0" by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 within an article titled "Fragmented Future" mainly referred to the emergence of the Web as a "transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens," the diversification of the media interfaces through which it occurs, and the resulting fragmented quality of this new interactive experience.¹⁷⁸ While tethered to a less active conception of interactivity, this iteration of the concept would shift away from the earlier understanding of the Internet as a conduit for information consumption and reframe it as a platform for user interactions. However, Web 2.0's more common definition would only become dominant after Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty further popularized and reimagined the concept in a 2004 conference brainstorming session with MediaLive International, Inc., a business company that manages and promotes information technology conferences — a session that was intended to reconceive the Web as a promising space for innovation following the damage caused to its reputation by the dot com crash. Afterwards, this new understanding of the term would be further solidified in a 2005 piece published online by O'Reilly wherein he optimistically characterized the foundational features of the Web 2.0. ethos — particularly its re-conceptualization of the Web as a "platform" for interactive activity online — along with those of the online platforms that embody it.¹⁷⁹ More specifically, some of the foundational elements of the Web 2.0. paradigm according to O'Reilly in this article — which include an intent to harness the "collective intelligence" of an online

¹⁷⁷ Russell Shaw, "Web 2.0? It Doesn't Exist," *ZDNET*, December 17th, 2005, <http://www.zdnet.com/article/web-2-0-it-doesnt-exist/>

¹⁷⁸ Darcy DiNucci, "Fragmented Future," *Print*, 53(4): 32, http://darcyd.com/fragmented_future.pdf.

¹⁷⁹ Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0.?" *O'Reilly Media*, Sept. 30th, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>

crowd, an inclusive “architecture of participation,” and a user positioning that allows users to control their own data — are used to assert the supposedly greater degree of inclusion and benefits afforded to citizen-users and organizations within platforms that model themselves on these features.¹⁸⁰ Further echoing past Internet rhetoric, O’Reilly also argues that the design patterns for Web 2.0. platforms necessitate a more significant recognition of the value offered by users and the cultivation of few restrictions and lower barriers to participation while their core competencies include benefiting from the wisdom of the crowd and trusting users as fellow partners.¹⁸¹ Similarly, computer scientist and venture capitalist Paul Graham in a 2005 website post would view a stronger respect for user contributions and “democracy” — meaning the newfound inclusion and empowerment of amateur users within the realm of production — as two of the Web 2.0 paradigm’s key principles.¹⁸² Furthermore, while similarly acknowledging the increasing importance of data manipulation and acquisition to the paradigm, Paul Miller in a 2005 article for the information studies magazine *Ariadne* would describe some of its guiding principles to include: its “participative” character and appreciation of the value of user-generated content; its accommodation of users and their needs; its emphasis on sharing content and ideas; and its focus on “communication and facilitating community.”¹⁸³ Likewise, building on the descriptions of Graham and Miller in a 2007 article for the online journal *Webology*, author William F. Birdsall would champion the empowered role afforded to user communities within this new incarnation of the Web and the latter’s part in a wider social movement stressing the right of citizens to communicate.¹⁸⁴ Within this initial commentary, sites and applications shaped by the Web 2.0 paradigm are framed as platforms that support the needs of online users and communities and afford them greater control of their products, an inclusive degree of participation as valued co-creators, and the expanded ability to express themselves — elements that are also characterized as beneficial for businesses.

¹⁸⁰ Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0.?” *O’Reilly Media*, Sept. 30th, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>

¹⁸¹ Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0.?” *O’Reilly Media*, Sept. 30th, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=5>

¹⁸² Paul Graham, “Web 2.0,” November 2005, accessed March 18th, 2017, <http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html>

¹⁸³ Paul Miller, “Web 2.0: Building the New Library,” *Ariadne*, 45 (October 2005), retrieved March 21st, 2017, from <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue45/miller/>

¹⁸⁴ William F. Birdsall, “Web 2.0 as a Social Movement,” *Webology*, 4(2), Article 40. (2007). <http://www.webology.org/2007/v4n2/a40.html>

In his 2013 book *Software Takes Command*, Manovich himself has described the Web 2.0. paradigm as a shift away from a conception of the Web in terms of messages to be read towards a understanding of it as a platform for user activity.¹⁸⁵ In his 2017 book *Platform Capitalism*, Nick Snicerk would stress how Web 2.0 signaled a shift towards user-generated content and was similarly "packaged with a rhetoric of democratizing communication in which anyone would be able to create and share content online."¹⁸⁶ Even Schäfer describes the emergence of Web 2.0 services as signaling a "significant shift in cultural industries from creating media content for consumption towards providing platforms where content is created [...] by users."¹⁸⁷ In addition, however, he would also underline how, from the 1990s until 2001, the concept of participation in the emerging context of the Internet was defined in terms of access and connectivity while, with the Web 2.0 paradigm, it came to be conceived in terms of collaboration, collective action, and interaction.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, he claims that, coupled with an image of social progress that often ignores questions of power and cultural freedom,¹⁸⁹ the popular discourse about Web 2.0 stemming from interventions like O'Reilly's would increasingly perceive it as a "democratizing way of simply using technologies in order to stimulate creativity."¹⁹⁰ In his view, this rhetoric often presented technology as a neutral foundation "enabling users to get in touch with their community and to benefit from collective achievements."¹⁹¹ More concretely, Schäfer would describe this discourse as framing Web 2.0 applications and their features in several key ways: 1) its user activity in terms of community belonging, collective production, unity, equality, and democratic action; 2) its afforded interactions as transforming users into content creators and displacing media industries; 3) itself as a novel and community-driven social phenomena distinct from past media practices and not primarily driven by capitalistic interests.¹⁹² Although Schäfer is correct to stress the tendency of Web 2.0 proponents to link the paradigm to communal and collaborative production, he does not fully acknowledge the co-existing individualistic focus on the creative user that is also an important part of narratives about Web 2.0 trends like the blog. In addition, his conception of

¹⁸⁵ Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 37.

¹⁸⁶ Nick Snicerk, *Platform Capitalism*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017), chap. 2, EBSCOhost Ebook Collection.

¹⁸⁷ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 148.

¹⁸⁸ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 31, 35.

¹⁸⁹ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 151-152.

¹⁹⁰ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 35.

¹⁹¹ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 36.

¹⁹² Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 37, 38.

Web 2.0 discourse does not adequately account for the presence of rhetoric about community and collective forms of production within earlier Internet discourse through concepts like "virtual communities" or "collective intelligence." Lastly, while early commentary about the Internet often did characterize it as a more accessible source of information, it also foregrounded the capacity of its afforded interactions to enable a wider and more inclusive range of citizens to become creators and distributors of media. Nevertheless, his description of Web 2.0 discourse remains useful for its outline of the key associations that would define it and for its contextualization of this paradigm, even if flawed, within the longstanding rhetoric about the Internet and the related structure of feeling previously sketched within this chapter.

As suggested by their parallels with several of the utopian assertions embedded within early Internet discourse, many of the more idealistic claims about online developments like blogging platforms — which embody many of the features associated with Web 2.0 paradigm — pre-exist the latter's popularization from 2004 onwards. For instance, various online articles and posts by writers like J.D. Lasica, Andrew Sullivan, Oliver Burkeman, Meg Hourihan, Catherine Seipp, and Scott Rosenberg would often frame — or feature interview subjects who characterize — blogs as a revolutionary, inclusive, and democratizing medium that, due to its supposedly unmediated character, allowed individual citizens to circumvent the exclusionary gatekeeping seen in traditional media caused by newspaper editors or advertisers and become publishers who can produce and distribute their own informative, alternative, and diverse media free and independently of these constraints.¹⁹³ Within a 2002 article, *Newsweek's* Steven Levy would even present blogging as realizing the past "unfulfilled promise" of the Web to enable a larger amount of citizens to instantaneously express and broadcast their own views.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, contemporaneous with the rising prominence of blogs within American elections, the

¹⁹³ See J.D. Lasica, "Blogging as Form of Journalism," *Online Journalism Review*, May 24th, 2001, last modified on April 29th, 2002, <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017958873.php>; J.D. Lasica, "Web Blogs a New Source of News," *Online Journalism Review*, May 31st, 2001, last modified on April 18th, 2002, <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1017958782.php>; Andrew Sullivan, "The Blogging Revolution," *Wired*, May 1st, 2002, <https://www.wired.com/2002/05/the-blogging-revolution/>; Oliver Burkeman, "Bloggers Catch What the Washington Post Missed," *The Guardian*, December 21st, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2002/dec/21/internetnews.usnews>; Meg Hourihan, "What We're Doing When We Blog," *O'Reilly Media*, June 13th, 2002, <http://archive.oreilly.com/pub/a/javascript/2002/06/13/megnut.html>; Catherine Seipp, "Online Uprising," *American Journalism Review*, June 2002, <http://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=2555>; Scott Rosenberg, "Much Ado About Blogging," *Salon*, May 10th, 2002, http://www.salon.com/2002/05/10/blogs_2/

¹⁹⁴ Steven Levy, "Living in the Blog-Osphere," *Newsweek*, August 28th, 2002, <http://www.newsweek.com/living-blog-osphere-144335>

publications of journalism professor and media critic Jay Rosen and other writers like Bruce Bartlett and Lisa Stone would also characterize blogs as lowering former barriers to participation and empowering a more inclusive array of non-professional citizens and amateurs to express their diverse and alternative views through the media they are now more easily able to produce and distribute.¹⁹⁵ While often recognizing the inequality, hierarchies, constraints, and flaws found in the blogosphere,¹⁹⁶ even pragmatic assessments of blogging in 2003 and 2004 by commentators like Drezner and Farrell along with the *Boston Globe's* Joanna Weiss often give voice to this characterization of blogs as empowering, low-cost, and decentralized Web platforms that allow anyone in the world to participate more fully within democratic politics and produce media which can represent a greater diversity of views, thus avoiding the gatekeeping of traditional mass media.¹⁹⁷ Outside blog posts and journal and newspaper articles, this narrative about the wider democratization and decentralization of media production and distribution through the networked communication of the Social Web — in particular, Web 2.0 phenomena like blogs — would also begin to be the one of the dominant topics of many contemporaneous books addressing its potential such as Dan Gillmor's *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (2004) and other similar texts by writers from a wide range of political backgrounds.¹⁹⁸ Gillmor's book even characterizes the Web 2.0 form of the blog as coming the closest to fulfilling the Web's read/write promise expressed in the 1990s.¹⁹⁹ While the presence

¹⁹⁵ Jay Rosen, "What's Radical About the Weblog Form in Journalism," *PressThink*, October 16th, 2003, http://archive.pressthink.org/2003/10/16/radical_ten.html; Jay Rosen, "The Weblog: An Extremely Democratic Form in Journalism," *PressThink*, March 8th, 2004, http://archive.pressthink.org/2004/03/08/weblog_demos.html; Bruce Bartlett, "Bless the Blogs," *Townhall*, Jan. 3rd, 2003, <https://townhall.com/columnists/brucebartlett/2003/01/03/bless-the-blogs-n1175309>; Lisa Stone, "A Nod to Blogs: More Views for the Grass Roots to Graze On," *Los Angeles Times*, Home Edition, July 30th, 2004, E35

¹⁹⁶ Daniel W. Drezner and Henry Farrell, "Web of Influence," *Foreign Policy* 145 (Nov.-Dec. 2004): 34-35, 39-40; Joanna Weiss, "'Blogs' Shake The Political Discourse Website 'Bloggers' Changing The Face of Political Campaigns," *Boston Globe*, Third Edition, July 23rd, 2003, A1

¹⁹⁷ Drezner and Farrell, "Web of Influence," 32-35, 38, 40; Weiss, "'Blogs' Shake The Political Discourse Website 'Bloggers' Changing The Face of Political Campaigns," A1.

¹⁹⁸ For examples of these types of manifestos and their espousal of this narrative, see Dan Gillmor, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2004), xii-xiv, 10, 18, 24, 26, 45, 162, 236-238; Jerome Armstrong and Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2006), 173; Glenn Reynolds, *An Army of Davids: How Markets and Technology Empower Ordinary People to Beat Big Media, Big Government, and Other Goliaths* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Current, 2006), xii-xiii, 8-9, 91, 95, 113, 121, 135, 258-259, 261, 267; Hugh Hewitt, *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation that's Changing Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 6, 63, 70-71, 94, 103; Joe Trippi, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, The internet, and the Overthrow of Everything*, (New York: Harper, 2008), 102, 105, 203, 205.

¹⁹⁹ Gillmor, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, 28, 237.

of hierarchies and the dominance of elites within the blogosphere would eventually be criticized by figures like Hindman,²⁰⁰ this early rhetoric about the empowerment afforded by blog platforms would create the initial foundation for the discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm that would soon follow after the concept's introduction.

However, beyond rhetoric about the potential of blogging platforms, discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm itself — in particular, its articulation with notions of transformative empowerment via the affordance of more control to users and the democratization of participation within politics and cultural production — would only begin to achieve a greater degree of dominance and visibility from 2005 onwards after O'Reilly's intervention. At that point, the new user-driven online phenomena deemed to embody it and the narrative of empowerment surrounding them would also come to be strongly associated with a vision of heightened user collaboration and community formation. For instance, contributing to this narrative are the early *Business Week* articles of writer Robert D. Hof from 2004 to 2006 within which he presents the new generation of online platforms and networked technologies — which would come to be linked to the Web 2.0 paradigm — as affording beneficial forms of empowerment and mass collaboration to users and businesses.²⁰¹ Furthermore, in a 2006 article for *Wired*, Kevin Kelly would describe the emerging "bottom-up" realm of social networking associated with Web 2.0 and its "smart mobs, hive minds, and collaborative action" as an empowering shift from the former passivity of mass media audiences to the more unpredictable participation of online users who are now driven by passion rather than by commercial interests.²⁰² Likewise, on his personal blog *PressThink* in 2006, Rosen would continue to celebrate this twenty first century incarnation of the Web and its various manifestations like blogging for empowering former audience members, now users, to more fully express themselves.²⁰³ Supporting such assertions and echoing Gillmor, Michael Arrington in a July 2006 *Ad Age* article would idealistically characterize Web 2.0 as "the inevitable evolution of the

²⁰⁰ Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, 108-109, 128, 140-141.

²⁰¹ Robert D. Hof, "The Power of Us: Mass Collaboration on the Internet is Shaping Up Business," *Business Week* 3938 (June 20th, 2005): 75-82; Robert D. Hof, "It's a Whole New Web and This Time It Will Be Built by You," *Business Week*, 3952 (September 26th, 2005): 76-79; Robert D. Hof, "The Web for the People," *Business Week* 3911 (December 6th, 2004): 18.; Robert D. Hof, "Web 2.0.: The New Guy At Work," *Business Week* 3989 (June 19th, 2006): 58-59.

²⁰² Kevin Kelly, "We Are the Web," *Wired*, August 1st, 2005, <https://www.wired.com/2005/08/tech/>

²⁰³ Jay Rosen, "The People Formerly Known as the Audience," *Pressthink*, June 27th, 2006, http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

web from a read-mostly medium to a read-write."²⁰⁴ Further reinforcing this belief in the expressive potential unleashed by this supposedly new embodiment of the Web, Mark Ward, in a 2007 BBC report, would describe online platforms modeled on the Web 2.0 paradigm as relinquishing control to user communities and thus allowing them more freedom to express themselves.²⁰⁵ Similarly, Grossman's famous announcement of *Time*'s Person of the Year as "You" characterizes the supposedly free collaborative activity of online users enabled by Web 2.0. platforms as reflecting "the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing" and a "revolution" with the capacity to "change the world."²⁰⁶ Furthermore, he champions these platforms' international users "for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game."²⁰⁷ Grossman even contextualizes Web 2.0 developments as part of "a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before," thus characterizing the paradigm as enabling a substantially larger amount of communal collaboration.²⁰⁸ Supporting this vision of Web 2.0 platforms as empowering citizens to distribute media and express themselves as well as to connect with others and build communities, Steven Levy, in an April 2006 article for *Newsweek*, also characterized online services and websites associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm — which he views as part of the new "Living Web" — as "ways to express yourself, means to connect with others and extend your own horizons" and to build, not an "audience," but a vibrant and beneficial "community" of collaborating users.²⁰⁹ Making similar claims in a 2006 article for *Computer Weekly*, Cliff Saran would characterize this supposedly new incarnation of the Web as being a space marked by a greater degree of "collaborative working" and "where communities can develop."²¹⁰ Reinforcing this vision of a Web 2.0

²⁰⁴ Michael Arrington qtd. in Beth Snyder Bulick, "Trying to Define Web 2.0," *Ad Age*, July 10th, 2006, <http://adage.com/article/digital/define-web-2-0/110357/>

²⁰⁵ Mark Ward, "What is This Thing Called Web 2.0.?", *BBC News*, last updated April 6th, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6529479.stm>

²⁰⁶ Lev Grossman, "You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time*, December 25th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

²⁰⁷ Lev Grossman, "You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time*, December 25th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

²⁰⁸ Lev Grossman, "You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time*, December 25th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

²⁰⁹ Steven Levy, "The New Wisdom of the Web," *Newsweek*, April 2nd, 2006, <http://www.newsweek.com/new-wisdom-web-107953>

²¹⁰ Cliff Saran, "Drive Business Change with Web 2.0," *Computer Weekly*, November 6th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2017, <http://www.computerweekly.com/feature/Drive-business-change-with-Web-20>

environment as enabling the formation of more communities, reporter Regina Lynn would state in a 2007 *Wired* article that, like "content was king in the 1990s, in the days of Web 2.0, community is the kingdom."²¹¹ Although not all of the above commentators would explicitly use the term Web 2.0 itself, their assessment of the online trends typically associated with it still connected them to an almost identical narrative of transformative empowerment and they made similarly optimistic claims about the new capacities these trends were unleashing for average citizens.

As briefly noted in the dissertation's introduction, criticism of Web 2.0 phenomena and the utopian discourse often surrounding it were visibly undertaken in this period by writers like Carr, Lanier, and Keen. Nevertheless, this idealistic discourse about Web 2.0 trends — which views them in terms of substantive empowerment for the connected citizens who participate in them — remained highly prominent amidst this criticism for a variety of reasons. Although this discourse is heavily indebted to the structure of feeling about digitally networked media technologies reflected in early 1990s rhetoric about the Internet, it sidestepped the growing criticism of the Web and the frequently optimistic commentary about it by reviving its central narrative of empowerment and many of its core claims in an altered and new form. It also circumvented such emerging critiques by distinguishing this 2.0 incarnation of the Web from earlier versions of the Web and by associating it with an exaggerated image of novelty that ignores the pre-existing celebratory commentary about the Internet in the 1990s. In this reformulation, the Internet of the 1990s was retroactively characterized in terms similar to mass media. More specifically, it was being defined by the uni-directional broadcast and passive consumption/reading of information while emerging platforms and applications associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm were portrayed as transformative successors that redeemed the flaws of the former by enabling a more substantive amount of interactive participation from and among average citizens within the realm of creative production and politics. In addition, as with early discourse about the Internet, rhetoric about Web 2.0 phenomena still implicitly positions them as more participatory and empowering counterparts to traditional media forms and established media industries like television and to the passive form of reception, gatekeeping, and cost-dependent restrictions with which they are often connected. However, despite this discursive

²¹¹ Regina Lynn, "Web 2.0 Leaves Porn Behind," *Wired*, August 10th, 2007, <https://www.wired.com/2007/08/sexdrive-0809/>

portrait of Web 2.0 phenomena as a novel alternative to mass media industries, the following chapter's case study analysis of YouTube-based fanvid parodies of Japanese animation will illustrate their residual interconnections with global mass media industries like film and television and specifically detail how the architecture and creative user content of social media platforms are always shaped and often restricted as a result of these lingering relations — a reality that often undercuts the narrative of transformative user empowerment circulated by the above discourse.

Aside from the manner in which the association of the Web 2.0 paradigm with novelty and its resurrection of pre-existing utopian claims about the Internet in a new form shielded it from past criticism, another reason for the persistence of this more positive vision of empowerment through the supposed democratization and greater autonomy afforded by a Web 2.0 environment to users — a similar belief that can also be found within early rhetoric about the Internet — is its proponents' initial affective reaction and growing emotional attachment to this new ecosystem during or following their interactive and perceptual experiences with it. Another explanatory factor is the emotional attraction that it holds for its proponents and other individuals who learn of it because, if true, this emerging online ecosystem then holds the potential to finally satisfy the longstanding social and affective desire of alienated Western workers and citizens for greater autonomy and power within the realm of creative production and politics. In addition, this affectively charged utopian discourse about this emerging online environment would also, in itself, propagate a positive affective response to Web 2.0 platforms and practices within others and influence them to adopt similarly idealistic beliefs about them — effects that often compel users to participate more deeply within this ecosystem. The enticing promise of empowerment and liberation found within Web 2.0 discourse functions as a complementary manifestation of post-industrial neoliberal capitalism's similarly attractive offer of enhanced creative agency and control to the contemporary workers and citizens within an information economy. Thus, this affectively charged claim of liberation and empowerment — which is meant to result from the heightened participation, collaboration, and inclusion supposedly afforded within a Web 2.0-based ecosystem— is a key part of this discourse's strategic role within a larger apparatus of control supporting this neoliberal economy and its various interests. More specifically, it functions to affectively and ideologically encourage a large quantity of users to adopt a creative

form of neoliberal subjectivity that is highly productive and to voluntarily participate within Web 2.0 spaces, so as to then control and channel the resulting value for the benefit of capital.

Furthermore, Web 2.0 discourse's affect-driven association of the user participation and collaboration present within these emerging online spaces with a liberating form of empowerment and, occasionally, a communal and non-commercial character also substantially masks the profit-seeking capitalistic interests of the platforms and projects where this activity occurs, but also the financial interests of online users themselves. As part of a larger apparatus of control strategies seeking the reproduction of potentially profitable relationships between productive users and corporations, this discourse also minimizes the new forms of power relations, exploitation, and control that are often cultivated and enacted within this ecosystem and, by extension, perpetuates them. Moreover, the frequently unifying and "global" emphasis of Web 2.0 discourse's narrative of participatory and collaborative empowerment for citizens and communities also represses other divides and hierarchies between different groups of individuals in the world. Akin to the utopian rhetoric about the democratization of political and cultural participation enabled by the Internet from the 1980s onwards, it often deliberately avoids acknowledging the different degrees of access to networked digital technologies and the varying levels of skill with them present in the world and among different demographic groups along with other obstacles to participation for users in specific countries. By misleading online users about the real constraints and hierarchies present within a Web 2.0-based online ecosystem and, in tandem with the affective appeal of its promises, thus further attracting them into participating within it as productive subjectivities, the above discourse — as part of a larger apparatus — supports the more socially expansive paradigm of flexible control and value extraction that has come to define our current communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and its profit-driven channeling of the wider social, cultural, and media products of citizens.

Spread of Web 2.0. Discourse within Scholarship

This more positive and optimistic discourse about platforms and practices embodying the Web 2.0 paradigm would also reappear within academic literature from a variety of fields from 2006 onwards, even though many other scholars had contemporaneously adopted a more critical stance towards this seemingly novel incarnation of the Web and the utopian rhetoric that often surrounds it. For instance, while he would eventually criticize the Web 2.0 paradigm, the first edition of Jenkins' 2006 book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*

contained many optimistic assertions about the increased participatory potential and collective intelligence that could result from the arrival of networked digital technologies, which significantly paralleled those present within Web 2.0 discourse. Echoing this discourse, Jenkins' optimistic view of the empowering potential of online participatory culture is particularly felt within his positive characterization of the grassroots creativity that is re-emerging to a prominent position within twenty first century convergence culture and responding to media corporations.²¹² Furthermore, bolstered by this edition's optimistic view of participation as an open-ended process that gives more control to media consumers,²¹³ Jenkins' text further echoes the idealistic vision of heightened cultural participation present within Web 2.0 discourse by characterizing its digital incarnation within the era of media convergence as part of a culture where "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of content."²¹⁴ Lastly, further echoing the optimistic viewpoint of Web 2.0 discourse, but with less hyperbole, he also asserts that, in recent years, the Web has enabled a greater distribution of amateur cultural productions as well as a larger and more visible amount of independent participation in the distribution and production of cultural goods.²¹⁵

Moreover, although he also does not deploy the term Web 2.0. and distances his work from the utopianism of 1990s Internet evangelists, Yochai Benkler's book *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* published in the same year replicates many of the contemporaneous utopian claims of Web 2.0 discourse and its precursors, thus further legitimizing them. More specifically, despite existing critiques of the frequent representation of the Web as a beneficial Habermasian public sphere,²¹⁶ in this book, Benkler idealistically envisions the Internet as cultivating a networked public sphere and information economy that can include a wider range of creative and political expressions by citizens. Moreover, while Benkler refuses to view the Internet as a space of pure liberation, he favourably compares the networked public sphere and economy to which it supposedly gives shape against market-based mass media. In his view, within a mass media model of communication, power is

²¹²See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, First Edition (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 131-168.

²¹³ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, First Edition, 133.

²¹⁴Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, First Edition, 290.

²¹⁵Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, First Edition, 131, 133.

²¹⁶Jodi Dean, "Why the Net is not a Public Sphere," *Constellations* 10, no. 1 (2003): 95-112, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00315>.

heavily concentrated in the hands of a small number of powerful people and outlets with enough capital to shape it and assume the required costs of media production.²¹⁷ Conversely, he claims that the public sphere and economy cultivated by networked digital technologies like the Internet — due to the latter's distributed architecture, lower cost of communication, and fewer barriers — offers a more inclusive and nonmarket alternative that resists this supposedly exclusionary form of centralized control by the elite.²¹⁸ Furthermore, he also argues that digital networks and the information economy they shape can increase the autonomy of citizens and benefit society: by including a larger range of perspectives and expanding the amount of information sources expressing them; enabling decentralized and nonproprietary forms of communication and peer production; and cultivating a new and more participatory folk culture that empowers individuals to participate in a more diverse range of creative activities including media production by themselves or with others.²¹⁹ Consequently, in his view, this emerging networked environment is a mostly democratizing force that empowers citizens to be "participants in a conversation" rather than mere "consumers and passive spectators" — roles that he implicitly associates with mass media.²²⁰ Reflecting Web 2.0 discourse's similarly optimistic perspective on online forms of mass collaboration would be Benkler's understanding of commons-based peer production and the enhanced form of social production driving a networked information economy. In his book, he characterizes these two processes as involving the decentralized and shared contributions and resources of a wide diversity of individuals, but he also, more importantly, depicts them as profitably changing the more exclusionary and restrictive relationship of corporations with consumers in the past to a more open one that empowers citizens to be creative subjects.²²¹ Here, Benkler's 2006 text reproduces the individualistic and collaborative dimensions of discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm by associating the online environment embodying it and cultivated by it with a narrative of empowerment, democratization, and inclusivity tied to connected groups or communities as well as the individuals that compose them. Similar parallels with Web 2.0 discourse can be found within Castells' 2009 book *Communication Power*. Despite

²¹⁷ Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 198-199, 200-204.

²¹⁸ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, 177, 212, 260-261.

²¹⁹ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, 134-140, 299-300.

²²⁰ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, 272.

²²¹ Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, 60-63, 81, 100, 126-127, 177, 272, 375.

acknowledging within this text the corporate control and gatekeeping that persist within a digitally networked media ecosystem, Castells optimistically emphasizes how, in contrast to mass media communication, this control could be counteracted by the power, autonomy, and diversity of communication afforded by the convergence of networked digital technologies and Web 2.0-based media platforms — the result of a new global mode of user-driven cultural production that he terms "mass self-communication."²²² Once again, a contrast with mass media is established in order to connect Web 2.0 phenomena like user-generated content with a narrative of empowerment, increased agency, and the democratization of cultural participation for average citizens through communication.

A similar discursive association would also later be made by other scholars like William Uricchio, John Hartley, and David Gauntlett within their own analyses of Web 2.0 phenomena. For example, in a 2009 article on the potential lessons that can be learned from participatory culture by media archivists, Uricchio claims that the new forms of distribution and authorship embodied by social media like blogs — due to their supposedly collaborative, dynamic and collective character — blur the former boundaries between the consumer and producer and can circumvent the centralized type of control often exerted by the state and media corporations.²²³ More specifically, he argues that, if embraced, the bottom-up logic of digitally networked technologies and social media can encourage a more expansive form of participation and collaboration from average citizens within the archival realm and enable the emergence of user-driven archival practices that can represent a wider range of values and media forms within society beyond those prized by an institutional elite.²²⁴ For his part, in his own work, Hartley has detailed the bardic function enabled by a Web 2.0 ecology or, more specifically, the latter's cultivation of a democratizing shift within the realm of communication away from the exclusionary representative model of broadcasting towards one defined by heightened audience productivity and self-representation.²²⁵ Elsewhere, within a variety of books from 2009 to 2012,

²²² Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55, 65-71, 73-74, 129-130, 132-136, 414-415, 418-419, 422, 431-432.

²²³ William Uricchio, "Moving Beyond the Artefact: Lessons from Participatory Culture," in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, eds. Marianne van den Boomen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 137-138, 140-141.

²²⁴ Uricchio, "Moving Beyond the Artefact: Lessons from Participatory Culture," 143-144.

²²⁵ See John Hartley, "Communicative Democracy in a Redactional Society," *Journalism*, 1.1. (2000): 39-48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490000100107>; John Hartley, "TV Stories: From Representation to Productivity." In *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling around the World*, eds. John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 16-36; John Hartley, "Less popular but more democratic?: Corrie, Clarkson and the

he has continued to present the Web 2.0 paradigm and online platforms embodying it like YouTube as expanding the field of knowledge beyond professional institutions and empowering users to communicate and create content, thus signaling a shift towards what he views as a broadband-based model of communication that enables a greater degree of productivity from citizens.²²⁶ Similar to the tendency of discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm to characterize it in opposition to a purportedly less inclusive incarnation of the Web, Gauntlett positively situates it and the online applications and platforms it shapes against the supposed walled gardens of Web 1.0.²²⁷ Moreover, despite acknowledging that Web 2.0 platforms do not guarantee that users to be heard on equal terms with other voices and that their commercial ownership by corporations like Google can often result in the restriction of their creativity,²²⁸ he still characterizes the Web 2.0 paradigm as part of an empowering "shift away from a 'sit back and be told' culture towards more of a 'making and doing' culture."²²⁹ More importantly, he describes the applications shaped by the paradigm as creating shared and inclusive spaces and platforms that allow individuals to collaborate with each other and share their own expressive content while harnessing the resulting collective productivity to create and offer an empowering service.²³⁰ With this perspective, he counters criticism of the mass collaboration and collective intelligence supposedly linked to the Web 2.0 paradigm for their production of content that is of lower quality than that created by individuals — or, more specifically, professionals — by presenting the Web 2.0 platform YouTube as a product of the mass collaboration between its users that, nevertheless, preserves the individuality of contributors and, in the process, higher quality content.²³¹ From this standpoint, he conceives of YouTube as a neutral and collaboratively produced "platform for creativity" for its individual users — a narrative of participatory empowerment that is often found within the more idealistic discourse about Web 2.0 trends.²³² In addition, although

dancing Cru," in *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, eds. Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (New York: Routledge, 2009), 20-30.

²²⁶John Hartley, "Uses of YouTube: Digital Literacy and the Growth of Knowledge," *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), 131-133; John Hartley, *The Uses of Digital Literacy*, (University of Queensland Press, 2010), 100-111; John Hartley, *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 125.

²²⁷ David Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), p. 5

²²⁸ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 212, 231.

²²⁹ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, p. 8.

²³⁰ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, p. 5-7, 13, 40, 88.

²³¹ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 203.

²³² Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 89.

Gauntlett does assert that certain conditions must be met in order for social media platforms to fulfill the promise of Web 2.0,²³³ his idealistic vision of the transformative potential of Web 2.0 platforms and services for citizens, nevertheless, compel him to defend them against the exploitation critiques detailed in this dissertation's introduction. Specifically, he claims that the contributed content of such platforms' online users is not the same as labour, nor does the value of an individual video or the whole outweigh the cost of hosting in a manner that create surplus value for these platforms. Simultaneously, he asserts that these contributions are voluntarily given and owned by users without any expectation of some form of remuneration — rather than being coerced and appropriated by the managers of the platforms themselves.²³⁴ However, as will be demonstrated in the chapter analyzing the YouTube-based practice of gameplay commentary, various factors complicate and undercut many of these counter-arguments to the exploitation critique. Ultimately, the optimistic assessments of the collaborative and participatory potential of Web 2.0 for average citizens undertaken by Uricchio, Hartley, and Gauntlett preserve the narrative of individual and collective empowerment often associated with it within its surrounding discourse. Akin to the less academic commentary described in the previous section, this scholarly discourse about online platforms and phenomena embodying the Web 2.0 paradigm is part of a discursive strategy of control that exists within a larger apparatus intended to support the neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism emerging in the twenty first century. Moreover, one of its primary effects is to solidify and legitimize the idealistic narrative of Web 2.0-enabled empowerment already being spread within more general commentary, thus further attracting the participatory social productivity of citizens and online users within this emerging online media ecosystem. Although the contagious affect driving this scholarly discourse about Web 2.0 and the beliefs it contains appears to be more muted and the reach of this rhetoric and its ideological impact is more limited within the realm of academia, the enthusiastic work of scholars like Benkler, Hartley, and Gauntlett still contributes to the wider circulation of an attractive and affectively charged belief in the empowering potential of emerging Web 2.0 platforms and applications for contemporary citizens — a belief that, once internalized, further encourages them to adopt productive neoliberal subjectivities and to participate and collaborate

²³³ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 224-226.

²³⁴ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 187-190.

more substantively with others within this new user-driven online media ecosystem for the benefit of capitalistic interests.

Web 2.0 Discourse and The Embrace of the Online Crowd's Collaborative Creativity

Through this discursive association of online developments embodying the principles of the Web 2.0 paradigm or the Social Web with an attractive vision of citizen empowerment via the democratization of participation within cultural production and politics, discourse about the paradigm and user-driven phenomena like blogs, which are connected to it, frequently perpetuate a neoliberal conception of empowerment and liberation that is strongly connected to an alluring individualistic conception of creative subjectivity. This subject position is heavily shaped by the increasing dominance of the solitary identity of the "user" within twenty first century online media ecosystems. However, as suggested by Schäfer's own previously mentioned discourse analysis, this discourse — as already partly seen within the commentary of writers like Grossman and Hof — also often describes these online trends as representing networked forms of user-driven collaboration, community formation, and collective empowerment or intelligence. These elements, while more strongly associated presently with the Web 2.0 paradigm, were also present within early utopian discourse about the Internet in the 1990s and complement the structure of feeling it perpetuated. O'Reilly's own appropriation of Levy's earlier term "collective intelligence" in his description of the concept of Web 2.0 — a term already similar to Kevin Kelly's earlier conception of the networked hive mind — reflects the continuity between discourse about the former and the pre-existing communitarian rhetoric about the Internet. The personal and collaborative sides of the user-generated content embodying the Web 2.0 paradigm are even explicitly acknowledged by reporter John Lanchester in a 2006 article for *The Guardian's* website wherein he remarked on the existence of two overlapping types of sites dedicated to "user-created content": one focusing on personal media like vlogs on YouTube and the other on more collaborative media productions.²³⁵ Similarly, in his previously mentioned 2006 *Newsweek* article, Steven Levy championed the wisdom of the crowd of online users and communities connected by Web 2.0 platforms and services.²³⁶ Eventually becoming intricately connected to Web 2.0 rhetoric, this complementary discourse about network-enabled forms of

²³⁵ John Lanchester, "A Bigger Bang," *The Guardian*, November 4th, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2006/nov/04/news.weekendmagazine1>

²³⁶ Steven Levy, "The New Wisdom of the Web," *Newsweek*, April 2nd, 2006, <http://www.newsweek.com/new-wisdom-web-107953>

collaboration between users or with them — including seemingly novel practices like crowdsourcing as will be illustrated in this dissertation's fourth chapter — has its foundation within an array of texts from the already mentioned work of Levy to emerging literature from the early 2000s onwards perpetuating this newfound collaborative vision of the Web, the networked crowd, and user communities, whether online or offline. Within this body of literature, citizens and consumers were often characterized as being democratically empowered to collaboratively produce and share creative content with themselves or with corporations by the networked architecture, participatory ethos, and sharing practices increasingly cultivated by the Web and the emerging social practices and platforms that would come to define it in the twenty first century.

For instance, in his 2003 book *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, even Rheingold would underline the potential creative and cooperative power of an online 'mob' of connected users without reductively characterizing this collaborative activity solely as a beneficial element for the businesses who decide to collaborate with this mob and take advantage of it.²³⁷ In contrast, influenced by Henry W. Chesbrough's concept of open innovation and its idealistic vision of beneficial collaborations between firms and external customers who are now empowered to contribute ideas,²³⁸ Coimbatore Krishnarao Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy's book *The Future of Competition* (2004) would positively depict emerging collaborative forms of value co-creation with corporations where consumers, with the help of the newfound access and interaction afforded by networked digital technologies, can take on a more meaningful role in the production process.²³⁹ Likewise, in his 2005 book *Democratizing Innovation*, Eric Von Hippel has foregrounded the collaborative and distributed creativity of user-driven innovation communities — a productive resource that is increasingly encouraged and harnessed by the firms with which they collaborate — while ultimately arguing that it reflects a democratized form of innovation that benefits corporations.²⁴⁰ These texts complement the contemporaneous writings of O'Reilly about Web 2.0 principles and its own framing of emerging forms of online user collaboration as a resource that can be beneficially harnessed by new online businesses.

²³⁷ Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: the Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2003), 197-198, 211-212, 214-215.

²³⁸ Henry W. Chesbrough, *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), xxiv-xxviii, 56.

²³⁹ C.K. Prahalad and Venkat Ramaswamy, *The Future of Competition: Co-Creating Unique Value with Customers*, (Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 1-5, 5-12, 14-17, 67.

²⁴⁰ Eric von Hippel, *Democratizing Innovation*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), 93-97, 107-110, 121-124.

However, it was James Surowiecki's book *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004) that would popularize the more utopian conception of network-enabled forms of user-driven collaboration — a conception which strongly informs Web 2.0 discourse and its implicit characterization of the Web 2.0 paradigm as a beneficial resource for various business enterprises and organizations. While mostly opting to use Levy's pre-existing concept of collective intelligence, O'Reilly himself would explicitly and almost interchangeably refer to Surowiecki's concept of the "wisdom of the crowds" in his 2004 description of Web 2.0 formats like blogs and their beneficial collective production of a new useful form of knowledge and value-based filtering.²⁴¹ Echoing the idealization of networked forms of collaborative knowledge seen within the work of Kelly, Levy, and Rheingold, Surowiecki champions the benefits of harnessing the 'wisdom' of a connected crowd of individuals with the help of the Internet and the networked interactions it increasingly affords during the twenty first century.²⁴² Despite seemingly championing the beneficial intelligence and value of a networked group or crowd over that of the individual user, he actually preserves a neoliberal form of individualistic subjectivity akin to the one implicitly embedded within later Web 2.0 discourse by arguing in his book that a truly 'wise' crowd must be composed of decentralized individuals who hold heterogeneous ideas.²⁴³ Surowiecki's "wisdom of the crowds" thus parallels Levy's pre-existing notion of "collective intelligence," which similarly privileges the heterogeneity and individual qualities of citizens connected through the Web's networked architecture.²⁴⁴ However, Surowiecki's text presents the networked crowd's wisdom and creativity as powerful alternatives to a field of knowledge production controlled by experts and rehabilitates it from the stigmatized image of the crowd as a chaotic and unintelligent force that was shaped by the mass psychology of the late-nineteenth century — an image that continues to be present within contemporary depictions of the crowd many decades later. For instance, within the translation of his seminal publication *Collective Intelligence* released in 1997, Levy would associate the crowd with stupidity, incoherence, a lack of self-direction, and minimal internal communication.²⁴⁵ Despite this different understanding of the

²⁴¹ Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0.?" *O'Reilly Media*, Sept. 30th, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=3>; Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0.?" *O'Reilly Media*, Sept. 30th, 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=5>;

²⁴² James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 31-32, 36, 39, 41, 227, 275, 278, 281.

²⁴³ Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, 10, 28-29, 31, 36-39.

²⁴⁴ Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, 53-54, 66-67, 83-84, 115.

²⁴⁵ Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, 81.

crowd, Surowiecki and Levy's visions of an intelligence that is collectively produced with the help of networked digital technologies remain complementary.

Contemporaneous with the similar Web 2.0 rhetoric about enhanced user collaboration espoused by proponents like O'Reilly and often influenced by it, later publications would further contribute to this growing perception of the twenty first century Web as enabling highly beneficial collaborative forms of crowd-driven creativity and knowledge production. For instance, in his 2008 text *We-Think*, Charles Leadbeater channels Web 2.0 discourse's central narrative of participatory and collaborative empowerment for citizens. More specifically, he argues that, by combining communal collaboration with corporate commerce and including consumers within the creative process, the new collective mode of participatory production and creativity — which the Web enables communities to undertake — deviates from closed and hierarchical models of production and empowers global citizens to create together on a more equal basis with other organizations.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, he also replicates Web 2.0 discourse's rhetoric about the empowerment of amateurs when, due to these claimed effects, he argues that this new paradigm of collective production specifically empowers “a mass of amateurs.”²⁴⁷ Drawing on Surowiecki's influential conception of the wise crowd as needing to have a heterogeneous composition, Leadbeater similarly argues that, in order for the collaborative creativity and knowledge embodied by his Web-dependent concept of "We-Think" to emerge, the individual members of the participating networked communities are required to be diverse in thought and skill.²⁴⁸ Likewise, in their 2006 book *Wikinomics* and its 2008 expansion, Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams also contribute to this emerging complementary discourse about user-driven forms of collaborative creativity, but they would also more specifically connect it to online phenomena which embodied several of the Web 2.0 paradigm's key principles like wikis. For instance, through their central concept of wikinomics, they describe a new communal and collaborative mode of networked production that is marked by openness, peering, sharing, and global action, but which is also self-organized, non-hierarchical, and free from past restrictive forms of control — a connected form of collaborative production that, they argue, could expand the possibilities for innovation, knowledge production, and diversity for firms and

²⁴⁶ Charles Leadbeater, *We-Think* (London: Profile Books, 2008), 89, 192, 208, 221, 227-228.

²⁴⁷ Leadbeater, *We-Think*, 56.

²⁴⁸ Leadbeater, *We-Think*, 82

user communities.²⁴⁹ Moreover, describing it as a form of "mass collaboration," they also perceive this networked form of collaborative activity as involving corporations and online communities of empowered amateurs that enter into voluntary collaborative arrangements with each other in order to create value and attain shared goals.²⁵⁰ Later in his 2012 book *Net Smart*, Rheingold, building on his past work a few decades earlier, parallels some of Tapscott and Williams' assertions about the emergence of wikinomics and similarly argues that the Web facilitates a transformative form of 'mass collaboration' that allows a networked crowd's potential to be harnessed and for its members to fulfill their shared goals.²⁵¹ However, reflecting the influence of pre-existing interventions by Levy, Surowiecki, and Leadbeater, within this text, his understanding of collective intelligence or "Net smart" once again frames diversity as essential to the formation and successful deployment of this potential.²⁵² Lastly, within his own publications *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus* published in 2008 and 2010, respectively, writer Clay Shirky would also contribute to this emerging portrait of the twenty first century Web as a tool that further enables an empowering form of networked collaboration among users. Specifically, he would support this increasingly pervasive narrative about the contemporary Web by asserting that it offers formerly passive citizens the capacity to have more power by allowing them to more easily coordinate their actions, form into groups, and collaboratively create value together.²⁵³ More importantly, he also contributes to this narrative by declaring that the collaborative forms of creation enabled by the networking capacity of twenty first century digital tools are driven by the newfound participation of amateurs they afford and that this shift has a democratizing effect on the field of cultural expression.²⁵⁴

Beyond such manifestos, however, the work of scholar Axel Bruns would also contain, to a lesser degree, an idealistic form of rhetoric about collaborative forms of networked production that complements similar discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and the collaborative potential it

²⁴⁹Don Tapscott and Anthony D Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Original Edition (New York: Portfolio, 2006), 1, 3, 11, 20, 62, 270; Don Tapscott and Anthony D Williams, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Expanded Edition (New York: Portfolio, 2008), 147, 271, 290.

²⁵⁰Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*, Original Edition, 12,-15, 17, 67, 148-150; Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*, Expanded Edition, 314.

²⁵¹ Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), 147, 154.

²⁵² Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, 160, 162.

²⁵³Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 47, 54, 187, 292, 304; Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010), 63, 95, 118.

²⁵⁴Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, 83-84, 94, 123-125, 296-298.

unleashes among users and businesses. For example, Bruns' description of the collaborative dimension of his term "produsage" — which is developed in his 2008 book *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* — positions the participatory form of collaborative creation afforded by networked communication and undertaken by seemingly self-governing communities against a more traditionally top-down and industrial mode of control over production.²⁵⁵ Consequently, he defines the key principles of collaborative produsage as being: 1) open participation coupled with communal evaluation; 2) fluid heterarchy and ad hoc meritocracy rather than command and control; and 3) the sharing of property along with the acquisition of individual intrinsic rewards for participants.²⁵⁶ Although the sharing of property is not a core trait typically associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm, his work still parallels discourse about it when he specifically claims that the creative incarnation of collaborative produsage embraces the potential for all participants to become artists and thus affords them that opportunity.²⁵⁷ Although Bruns recognizes that the concept of Web 2.0 is often deployed to describe the technosocial developments that he associates with his term "produsage" or produsage communities and that it is very clearly a part of the wide array of trends that the latter umbrella term seeks to address,²⁵⁸ he himself stresses how O'Reilly's concept has come to represent the increasing economic interest in the potential benefits of collaborative, social, and communal content creation.²⁵⁹ From the popular manifestos outlined in the previous paragraph to the more and critical scholarly work of Bruns, the twenty first century Web — and, in the case of Bruns, the Web 2.0 trends associated with it — is frequently presented as affording new collective forms of collaborative creativity and production in a manner that complements and reproduces the claim about heightened user collaboration promulgated within discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and the online phenomena that embody its principles.

Exemplifying this mutually constitutive and complementary relationship with Web 2.0 discourse, the published manifestos of Leadbeater, Tapscott, Williams, and Shirky all associate the networked forms of collaborative production supposedly afforded by the Web, whether implicitly or explicitly, with an image of greater empowerment via democratized participation

²⁵⁵Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (New York, Peter Lang, 2008), 14, 15, 16-18.

²⁵⁶ Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, 23-30.

²⁵⁷ Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, 230-231.

²⁵⁸ Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, 2, 5.

²⁵⁹ Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, 3-4.

for connected communities of amateur users. This narrative strongly parallels and supports the one being contemporaneously perpetuated within Web 2.0 discourse and, as argued in this project, reveals the above rhetoric to be its own incarnation of this very discourse. Moreover, akin to the tendency within Web 2.0 discourse to describe the collaborative activity or collective intelligence of online users as a resource to be beneficially harnessed by the businesses in collaboration with these users, the textual interventions of Leadbeater, Tapscott, and Williams in particular also conceive of this user-driven and relatively free type of online collaborative activity as something that can involve a form of collaboration with corporations themselves and which can be flexibly channeled and managed. For instance, while stressing the less hierarchical and mostly self-governing character of these new collaborative modes of networked production, Leadbeater, Tapscott, and Williams, nevertheless, foreground the need of an open and community-oriented form of leadership to govern them, often through the creation of flexible guiding rules for other participants.²⁶⁰ Thus, complementing Web 2.0 discourse while being simultaneously shaped by it, some of this rhetoric about the Web's increasing affordance of collaborative creativity suggests a more open-ended dynamic with users. This less restrictive dynamic with users parallels the rhetoric about flexible management and heightened creative autonomy that started to emerge from the 1970s onwards and provide the foundation for a new neoliberal, post-industrial, and communicative paradigm of capitalism that is driven by relatively autonomous participatory and collaborative activity from average citizens. As illustrated in many of the above texts, their frequently optimistic representation of networked forms of collaboration often foreground how the contributors to this collaborative creativity need to be heterogeneous and autonomous in order for the largest share of benefits or the most wise decisions to emerge from this activity. Thus, echoing co-existing rhetoric about the Web 2.0 paradigm and the trends that mark it, this complementary and intricately related discourse about network-powered forms of collaborative production — which has become increasingly dominant in recent years — is frequently articulated with a similarly affectively charged narrative of empowerment. This narrative, while seemingly focused on collective formations, preserves a neoliberal and individualistic form of creative subjectivity and implicitly compels the members of these seemingly collaborative groups to adopt it as well as to express and produce their own creative

²⁶⁰Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*, Original Edition, 25; Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*, Expanded Edition, 297; Leadbeater, *We-Think*, 89, 117.

ideas and works, often for an organization's given project or platform. It is thus part of the same apparatus of discursive and non-discursive control strategies as the Web 2.0 rhetoric described earlier in this chapter. Partially encouraged by the ideological and affective allure of this discourse's distorted vision of collaborative citizen empowerment within the social realm of digital networks, the voluntary adoption of this neoliberal subject position and the active engagement in the productive participatory activity of users that usually follows — as a desired effect of this flexible apparatus of control — ultimately supports a new communicative paradigm of neoliberal capitalism that thrives on the harnessing of the creative autonomy of online users and their participatory and collaborative products. While the above literature on networked forms of collaborative creativity is a complementary part of Web 2.0 discourse's support of this communicative paradigm of capitalism, one of the more dominant manifestations of this rhetoric about online collaboration — as will be illustrated through the discursive analysis that is the focus of this dissertation's fourth chapter — is the discourse about the Web 2.0-related and seemingly collaborative practice of crowdsourcing, particularly its use to produce media with a connected crowd of online users.

However, in the following second section of this dissertation analyzing more individualistic incarnations of the participatory and collaborative media practices associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm — specifically, YouTube-based social media practices like fanvid parodies and gameplay commentary videos — its two chapters will demonstrate how certain claims of this more utopian version of Web 2.0 discourse, especially its promise of a more personal form of empowerment through online participation, are strategically deployed by Web 2.0-based media platforms like YouTube and related corporate entities like MCNs in order to encourage and profitably channel participatory and collaborative forms of creative productivity from online users. Likewise, in this dissertation's third section analyzing the seemingly collaborative and user-driven process of crowdsourcing, particularly its use to produce media, discourse about the practice and the projects that use it will be revealed to be heavily informed by the complementary collaborative incarnation of Web 2.0 rhetoric detailed in the previous paragraphs. This discourse and the projects that co-opt it will also be shown to be making many of the same claims about citizen empowerment through enhanced participation and about the need for professional management to channel their productivity. Lastly, as with the preceding section, it will be demonstrated, through the analysis of specific examples of media

crowdsourcing like YouTube's global documentary mosaic *Life in a Day* or the crowdsourced remake project *Star Wars Uncut*, that many of the key assertions embedded within Web 2.0 discourse and reproduced inside crowdsourcing rhetoric are again strategically appropriated by the organizers of these projects. Specifically, these case study analyses will illustrate how these media crowdsourcing projects rely on the same type of discursive strategies that are found within the previously mentioned apparatus of communicative capitalism, so as to compel and then channel the type of user-driven online participation and collaboration they require. In all of the case study analyses within these two next sections, various forms of discourse about Web 2.0 trends and platforms will be shown to support the reproduction of this neoliberal capitalistic paradigm's mode of flexible control, its exploitation of user-generated labour, and its profit-driven formation of asymmetrical power relations between online users and corporate media interests, so as to more easily control and channel their productive activity. Moreover, despite the relatively autonomous tactical interactions of users within this twenty first century online media ecosystem and the more utopian claims about the participatory and collaborative empowerment afforded to citizens by the contemporary Web — which were detailed in this chapter — the following case studies will reveal the hierarchies of control and unequal exchanges of value with users that are often cultivated by the corporate interests and platform owners currently operating within this networked environment in order to satisfy their desire for profit. Through the concrete power relations and forms of inequality uncovered within these case study analyses, the next few sections and chapters of this dissertation will resist the attractive utopian character of Web 2.0 discourse and its ideological masking of various forms of power asymmetry and user exploitation while underlining the distorted character of the idealistic picture that it creates of our twenty first century online media ecosystem and the actual opportunities it affords.

Section II:

Critical and Political-Economic Analysis of User-Generated Media on YouTube

Chapter Two: The Flexible Control of User-driven Online Media: The Western Otaku Practice of Fanvid Parody on YouTube

With the twenty first century emergence of a user-driven online media ecosystem of Web 2.0 platforms and practices discursively framed as neutral foundations for the radical empowerment of amateur creators and groups, a critical and political-economic approach is necessary in order to properly analyze the networked manifestations of participatory media culture currently occupying this space and to subsequently uncover and grasp the asymmetrical relations of power and exchanges of value in which their practitioners are often situated. It is also essential in order to fully understand these unequal power relationships as the product of a communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and the apparatus of flexible control strategies that supports it, whether through the strategic use of Web 2.0 discourse and its affective appeal or through the policy decisions, determined rules, architectural choices, and contractual relationships adopted by social media platforms and their associated corporate interests. As already stated in the introduction, this approach must acknowledge the affective dimension of this new capitalistic paradigm of control and its intersection with discursive strategies, but also the affective character of the productive type of social and cultural labour that this new mode of power formation seeks to incentivize within contemporary citizens. In particular, it needs to recognize the relatively autonomous forms of labour involved in the production and online distribution of amateur media within this new ecosystem of user-generated content — including the immaterial labour described by Hardt and Negri — while also acknowledging the affective predispositions that often drives it as well as the affective and communicative relationships that it often fosters with other users. Any critical analysis of this now dominant Web 2.0-based ecosystem resulting from such an approach will be better equipped to demonstrate how the aforementioned mode of communicative capitalism flexibly controls these forms of labour through a variety of strategies that actively encourage, afford, and harness the participatory creative agency of the online users inhabiting this environment, so that the platform owners and corporate interests surrounding it can better extract the potential value resulting from its products. Lastly, contrary to the discourse of novelty and increased independence surrounding Web 2.0 phenomena, such an analysis should always acknowledge how the strategies and choices shaping this user-driven online ecosystem, while seeking to maximize networked forms of user participation, still impose certain limitations on them and that the latter constraints often

result from this environment's persistent connections to the proprietary interests of already established global media industries like television, film, and animation. Throughout this chapter, a critical and political-economic approach to the analysis of the user-generated media practices now inhabiting this ecosystem will be deployed to examine the mostly YouTube-based social media incarnation of a pre-existing and appropriation-based video practice known as fan parody by Western anime enthusiasts and the complicated relationship between the affect-driven tactics, creative agency, and labour of its practitioners with the apparatus of control strategies stemming from the convergence of more traditional media industries, Web 2.0. platforms, and contemporary copyright law within North America, particularly the United States.

The fanvid practice at the center of this chapter's critical analysis involves Japanese animation fans from the West who appropriate the animated footage of Japanese television shows and films, radically transform it for comedic purposes into abridged parody episodes or films through dubbing and various forms of audiovisual manipulation, and then upload this content for free on social media platforms like YouTube to be watched by like-minded fans. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, fanvid parody as an amateur practice — including its user-driven social media incarnation — is a new non-hierarchical, postmodern, and transformative form of otaku engagement. Moreover, the formal style and compositing techniques present within its more recent digital incarnations increasingly embody the influence of the twenty first century Web's very own postmodern logic of media simultaneity and co-present screens — a development that accentuates the considerable investment of creative labour and time from fans that has always been involved within fanvid parody. More importantly, despite its relatively recent arrival within the realm of social media platforms, it will also be shown to carry a longstanding history that stretches from the burgeoning North American anime fandom of the 1980s to the present. This history will be traced in detail during the earlier sections of this chapter, so that the substantial changes experienced by contemporary practitioners of fanvid parody within Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube — in particular, the new obstacles and constraints they encounter — can be better contextualized as well as described in greater detail. More specifically, this chapter will underline how the architectural features of digitally networked Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube and the latter's rise in popularity within Western society have come to strongly shape the practice of fanvid parody — including its content, format, and style — and significantly expand the cultural circulation and visibility of the

resulting work of its practitioners within the West. Nevertheless, contrary to the tendency of discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and related practices like blogging to frame them as affording a transformative and empowering degree of autonomy from the gatekeeping found within more traditional media industries, this chapter will also highlight how the content and form of present fanvid parodies are still deeply indebted to the television and animated film industries within Japan and the United States and are as significantly shaped by them as their precursors in the past. More importantly though, supported by the aforementioned historical account of fanvid parody, this chapter's core argument will be to demonstrate how, partially due to the newfound visibility of fanvid parody series on YouTube, the creative activity of their producers have come to be negatively impacted due to their escalating degree of contact with these industries via the partly automated and often abusive copyright enforcement strategies adopted by YouTube. These strategies will be contextualized as a part of communicative capitalism's larger apparatus of flexible control and a product of a compromise between its desire to accumulate more monetizable user-generated content and its need to satisfy the proprietary demand of established media industries. Furthermore, this chapter's analysis of YouTube's partially automated copyright enforcement and content filtering system known as Content ID will foreground how the architectural choices of U.S.-based Web 2.0 platforms have been substantially shaped by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998, especially its requirement of online intermediaries to adopt notice and takedown procedures in order to be exempt from secondary liability over possible instances of copyright infringement committed by their users. Parallel to the more prohibitionist stance reflected by the global media corporations who use this Content ID system, this chapter will also unveil how American animation companies have started to incorporate these visible amateur creators of fanvid parodies on social media platforms like YouTube into their industry and collaborate with them as a means to harness their popularity with fans. It will also reveal how an increasing number of these creators are voluntarily entering into such supportive and professional relationships with these companies and frequently display, in their own work, a pronounced respect for the proprietary copyright environment of which they are a part. However, this chapter's analysis will also show how the affective passion of Western fans for Japanese animation series and films also manifests itself, often within fanvid parodies themselves, through the frequent criticism of excessive copyright enforcement, commodification strategies, and 'inauthentic' American localization practices.

Building on this acknowledgment of the importance of fan affect, this analysis will also illustrate how — even though contemporary manifestations of fanvid parody have become subject to the new paradigm of control exemplified by the Content ID system and the passionate affect often driving such participatory user creativity is frequently anticipated and channeled by Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube and other media companies — the fan affection for Japanese animation that motivates the labour of fanvid parody creators and then cultivates affectively charged communicative relationships with their fellow fans often compels them to circumvent some of the above apparatus' strategies of control. Specifically, similar to the constituent power deemed to be contained by Hardt and Negri within forms of labour that create immaterial products, this affective drive further encourages them to persist in their production and circulation of their transformative fair use content, online and offline, often through the construction of informal alternative media platforms on the Web to distribute it and enable its community of fans to engage with it within forums. However, rather than framing these tactics and the circumscribed agency they represent as existing in an oppositional relationship to commercial media industries or as being truly autonomous from capital, this chapter will ultimately reveal how the tactics and non-profit values of fanvid parody creators have a much more nuanced and complementary connection to established and digital media industries and how these creators occasionally adopt funding, community-building, and distribution platforms that echo their merchandising, community, and distribution strategies or which still significantly rely on the monetization systems and online hosting services they build.

In spite of the unique constraints and forms of control now encountered by contemporary creators of fanvid parodies, the discourse surrounding the Web 2.0 platforms that they now inhabit, particularly the Google-owned YouTube, often misleadingly represents the online form of creative participation they afford to users as being more transformative and radically empowering than in reality. As a more specific incarnation of the Web 2.0 discourse described in the previous chapter, such utopian rhetoric about social media platforms often tends to reductively position them as impartial foundations that democratically enable a more inclusive and wider range of citizens to participate in the realm of media production and distribution, thus radically empowering less established amateur creators to create media, to share it freely on the Web, and to potentially be rewarded for it. This cultivated utopian image of social media platforms as democratizing, inclusive, meritocratic, and empowering entities that take a hands-

off approach with regard to the media content generated by their users often masks the lingering power relations and hierarchies that these platforms often cultivate with users as well as attracts and disciplines them into adopting a creative form of subjectivity and interactively participating within their enclosed spaces for the commercial benefit of their owners— somewhat similarly to Andrejevic's notion of digital enclosures.

YouTube itself currently engages in this type of discourse within several sections of its website in order to represent itself as a radically empowering and democratizing platform for amateur creators and, thus, compel a larger amount of participants to engage with it and contribute additional media content to it — content that can be potentially monetized for its benefit. For example, within the platform's own description of its transformative “Vision,” YouTube is explicitly presented as a “daily destination” for “creativity” and “free expression” that has “fundamentally changed the video industry and democratized mainstream media.”²⁶¹ Moreover, this utopian description also characterizes the platform as providing “everyone the opportunity to contribute to the global exchange of ideas” and using technology in a manner that removes “the barriers to access and success in the video industry” with the intention to “empower our users.”²⁶² This same webpage also contains section titles suggesting that YouTube is “Empowering a generation” and “Upending the established order,” both of which reinforce this cultivated image of the platform as a novel, transformative, disruptive, and empowering force that is radically changing the mainstream media industry.²⁶³ Reinforcing this self-representation, scholar Kylie Jarrett would acknowledge the utopian promise of DIY broadcasting and a greater opportunity for self-expression, which is embedded within the platform's famous slogan “Broadcast Yourself” and supported by several of its key features and affordances, such as its offering of amateur users the ability to independently upload and share their own media.²⁶⁴ Reflecting the individualistic focus of its user-centric discourse, Jarrett even specifically addresses how this initial slogan actively “urges us to *do the broadcasting ourselves*” — an open-ended encouragement of a larger degree of media participation from the public that is supported by the increased user activity that its accessible core functions afford.²⁶⁵ Bolstered by

²⁶¹ “Our Vision,” *YouTube*, accessed April 14th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/jobs/vision.html>

²⁶² “Our Vision,” *YouTube*, accessed April 14th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/jobs/vision.html>

²⁶³ “Our Vision,” *YouTube*, accessed April 14th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/jobs/vision.html>

²⁶⁴ Kylie Jarrett, “Beyond Broadcast Yourself: The Future of YouTube,” *Media International Australia*, 126 (February 2008): 133-135, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X0812600114>.

²⁶⁵ Jarrett, “Beyond Broadcast Yourself: The Future of YouTube,” 133.

the relative openness of the platform and its main functions, YouTube thus presents itself as this transformative and empowering foundation which enables a more autonomous form of self-expression and media distribution for a wider range of global citizens including less established amateurs. This idealistic discourse of democratization and empowerment strategically deployed by YouTube — which is heavily indebted to the more general Web 2.0 rhetoric that surrounds the platform — functions to mask the power relations that exist between its owners, its participants, and its corporate media partners within this space. Lastly, in combination with its frequently explicit call to participate, YouTube's own utopian rhetoric about itself also attempts to influence citizens into believing in — or being emotionally moved by — its promising narrative of empowerment and, in the process, make them more likely to participate within its enclosed boundaries and inhabit the productive and often individualistic form of creative subjectivity it desires to inculcate within its users. By actively encouraging and stimulating the further participation of online users within YouTube, Google seeks to expand the amount of revenue, value, and benefits it can extract and accumulate from the widening number of monetizable videos, viewers, and subscribers resulting from this participatory activity.

Furthermore, this celebratory characterization of YouTube is also often reinforced through the commentary of several of the writers and scholars already described in the preceding chapter's discourse analysis — specifically, commentators who championed Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube for affording the distribution of a greater amount of creative activity and media production from average citizens. For instance, Grossman's well-known optimistic announcement of *Time*'s Person of the Year as “You” in 2006 represented Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, Wikipedia, and MySpace as radically empowering online users and starting a revolution through their democratization of participation and collaboration within the realm of media production and distribution.²⁶⁶ Likewise, as already addressed in the previous chapter, in the realm of academic literature, media scholars like Hartley and Gauntlett would characterize YouTube as a platform that empowers citizens to be creative and to produce and share their own media content.²⁶⁷ Strongly influenced by Web 2.0 discourse in general, such commentary would thus further contribute to the increasingly dominant representation of YouTube as an

²⁶⁶ Lev Grossman, “You – Yes, You – Are TIME's Person of the Year,” *Time*, December 25th, 2006, accessed April 3rd, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html>

²⁶⁷Hartley, “Uses of YouTube: Digital Literacy and the Growth of Knowledge,” 131-133; Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 89.

empowering platform that affords a wider range of individuals the ability to independently participate in the creation and distribution of media without being constrained by the restrictions and gatekeeping typically found within mass media industries. However, as has been argued by Jarrett, the reality of YouTube does not match this utopian image and its seemingly democratic, non-commercial, and social call for all online users to use the platform to participate in creativity and freely express themselves lies in tense conflict with its increasing situation within a political-economic regime primarily shaped by capitalistic interests and copyright law.²⁶⁸

Through this chapter's critical analysis of fanvid parodies from their origins to their popularization on YouTube, the above utopian image of the platform will be similarly resisted and the concrete limitations to the transformative participatory creativity of their creators — which are imposed by the adopted strategies of the platform — will be uncovered. Before critically examining the type of power relations in which the contemporary practitioners of fanvid parody are situated within YouTube and, by extension, the political economy of social media platforms like it, the following section will briefly describe the recent emergence of the abridged series — a digital format of fanvid parody that is highly popular on social media platforms amongst Western anime fans and which will be one of the core media objects analyzed in the later sections of this chapter. In addition, it will then trace the historical evolution of fanvid parody and its practitioners' associated tactics from the North American anime fandom of the 1980s to this current online incarnation on Google's platform. As suggested earlier, this historical account is essential in order to fully understand the persistently transformative character of the changing appropriation-based tactics of fanvid parody creators, the shifting nature of the methods used to distribute fanvid parodies, the consistently non-profit ethos of these creators, the increasing visibility of their work, and, lastly, their continuously complicated relationship with — and responses to — the established media industries of the U.S. and Japan and the commercial strategies they adopt to make Japanese animation more accessible to a local audience and to enforce their property rights.

Abridged Series and the History of Fanvid Parody within Western Otaku Fandom

On July 14th, 2006, Martin Billany, a British fan of the card game-centered Japanese animation series *Yu-Gi-oh! Duel Monsters* (2000-2004), uploaded a four minute fanvid parody of its first episode onto his YouTube account, an act that would soon popularize an otaku practice

²⁶⁸ Jarrett, "Beyond Broadcast Yourself: The Future of YouTube," 133-136, 138.

known as an abridged series within the social media platform. While mostly adhering to the original chronology of an animated series, an abridged series is typically composed of short, episodic videos that appropriate, alter, and parody the audiovisual content of episodes from a Japanese animation series. This transformed content is then re-dubbed in English by anime fans who perform a comedic script and eventually released as the episodes of an “abridged series” on a user channel within social media platforms. Through its transformative appropriation of existing media properties to create original works and its active participation within an emerging community of Western anime fans connected by Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, the practice of fanvid parody embodies the explicit and intrinsically motivated form of participation previously described in the work of Schäfer detailed in the introduction and usually addressed within the fan studies scholarship of Jenkins.²⁶⁹ However, due to its dominant presence as playlisted video series within the user channels of YouTube — to which many fans of Japanese animation would subscribe — and the large amount of user interactions and data it produced from its creators and their fans, the practice also reflects Schäfer's notion of implicit user participation — a concept which signaled the larger expansion of the cultural and creative industries into the social realm and which entailed the anticipation and channeling of user activity by the designed software and features of Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube.²⁷⁰ Echoing this concept, many of YouTube 's designed features would anticipate, afford, and actively seek to channel the specific form of user participation embodied by abridged series' short and serial user-created video content. The open-ended and public accessible character of YouTube's video uploading feature would afford, to a degree, potential amateur creators like fanvid parody producers the ability to distribute some of their content on the platform and, along with its title and video description tools and its tagging features, make it more easily discoverable for like-minded fans of the appropriated animation properties and of Japanese animation in general. Moreover, implicitly framed elsewhere as a means of preventing the wholesale re-upload of lengthy copyrighted content such as television episodes,²⁷¹ the platform's initial ten minute limit

²⁶⁹ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 43-45; Schäfer, "Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation," 148.

²⁷⁰ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 44-45, 50-51; Schäfer, "Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation," 148, 154.

²⁷¹ In a blog announcing the increase of the limit to 15 minutes for users, the previous 10 minute limit is implicitly framed as a means of preventing the upload of copyrighted content in its entirety. See Joshua Siegel, "Upload Limit Increases to 15 Minutes for all Users," *YouTube's Official Blog*, July 29th, 2010, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2010/07/upload-limit-increases-to-15-minutes.html>

for the videos of non-partenered users would compel the creators of parody-based abridged series to edit down the television episodes they appropriated and produce the shorter and easier-to-consume video content seemingly preferred by Google.²⁷² In addition, YouTube's early playlist and subscription features — both of which attempt to stimulate the type of regular programming and viewership seen within the broadcasting medium of television in order to commodify and sell the resulting audience's attention to advertisers — would also anticipate, afford, and strongly encourage the type of serial user-created content exemplified by abridged series. While, at the time, this transformative re-dubbing of animated content seemed like a novel practice due to the rising popularity of the abridged series format on social media platforms and the discourse of novelty surrounding these platforms and the Web 2.0 paradigm itself, fanvid parody — in particular, the use of fan dubbing within it — has a longstanding history beginning in the 1980s that would inform its current manifestation on YouTube. As remarked by Jenkins in Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's book *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009), the participatory media culture embodied by such fan practices and their alternative values pre-existed Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube for several decades and it would strongly influence the increasing amount of participatory user activity found within them.²⁷³ According to fan historian Fred Patten, the first recorded instance of a fandubbed parody video was a 1983 parody of *Star Blazers* (1979), an American localization of the Japanese science fiction animation series *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974-1975), which chronicles the struggle of the space battleship Yamato and its crew against an alien race known as the Gamilas.²⁷⁴ Entitled *You Say Yamato* (1983), the parody was produced by comedians and science fiction writers Nick Pollotta and Phil Foglio.²⁷⁵ A VHS tape was then exhibited at American science fiction conventions from 1983 onwards and, once additional copies were made, rendered accessible to anime enthusiasts over the ensuing years. Echoing Woody Allen's 1966 film *What's Up, Tiger Lily*, which comedically re-dubs the 1965 Japanese spy film *International Secret Police: Key of Keys*, the fandubbed parody was produced with taped copies of *Star Blazers* episodes 2, 3, 4, and 5 recorded from the television

²⁷² The so-called 'abridged' or shortened character of the parody episodes that shape an 'abridged series' was initially the result of YouTube's prescribed limit of 10 minutes for its user videos in effect until the summer of 2010.

²⁷³ Henry Jenkins, "What Happened Before YouTube," in *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, ed. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), 109-110.

²⁷⁴ Fred Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 years of essays and reviews* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2004), 32.

²⁷⁵ Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 years of essays and reviews*, 32.

broadcast of the show's second season involving a new villain, The Comet Empire. At the time, as detailed by Dave Merrill — a member of the fanvid parody group Corn Pone Flicks and creator of the anthology of fan-created skits and film shorts known as Anime Hell — early fanvid productions created from the 1980s onwards were mostly produced with tapes of a series' episodes, a recording device like a microphone, and two connected VCRs, some of which increasingly contained an audio input or dubbing function facilitating the dubbing process of a fanvid parody.²⁷⁶ A combination of these methods and tools were used to edit and re-dub the first season of *Star Blazers* and produce the parody *You Say Yamato*.²⁷⁷ During this same period, but especially in the 1990s, some of more expensive VCR decks used for AMVs and video-based parodies similar to *You Say Yamato* would occasionally possess flying erase heads, which allowed for cleaner edits that avoided the 'rainbow' screen effect that can appear when the erasure of a pre-existing video recording is incomplete.

Using some of these techniques, Pollotta and Foglio's *You Say Yamato* parody was produced. In its final form, the parody itself begins with the broadcast ending of the live action film *Superman* (1978) and an ad for a Wometco Home Theatre (WHT) pay television service over which the offscreen voice-over of two conflicted fictional employees within a broadcasting control room decide to air a dubbed episode of *Star Blazers* in spite of its “screwed up” soundtrack. In contrast to the relative seriousness of the original series, this dub features protagonist Derek Wildstar and part of the Star Force crew from the broadcasted localization debating the strategic usefulness of jokes about Gamilons, the alternate name for the alien enemy chosen for the *Star Blazers* localization. Afterwards, they also speak about engaging in more senseless violence rather than sex in order to boost the show's ratings because, in the restrictive realm of American television networks who are subject to their Standards and Practices departments, Japanese animation characters “can't have sex” according to Stephen Sandor — one of Wildstar's fellow crew members and science officer for the *Argo*, the localization's name for the original series' ship named the *Yamato*. In her own work on localization, Laurie Cubbison has argued that the alterations of animated series from Japan for U.S. broadcast are often undertaken to better appeal to a specific gender or cultural demographic and conform to societal

²⁷⁶ Dave Merrill, “Let's Anime: The Secret History of Anime Parody Dubbing,” *Let's Anime*, January 25th, 2008, accessed May 1st, 2016, <http://letsanime.blogspot.ca/2008/01/secret-history-of-anime-parody-dubbing.html>

²⁷⁷ “You Say Yamato,” streaming video, 33:12, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/you-say-yamato/>

values about the media representation of violence, sex, and drug consumption.²⁷⁸ The fandubbed dialogue of *You Say Yamato* thus implicitly critiques the inauthentic censorship of violence and sexual content within American localizations of Japanese animation. Nevertheless, the parody does opt to keep *Star Blazers*' Americanized character names. Even though it retains these names and the original name “Yamato” for the series' titular battleship as opposed to the dub's *Argo*, this above preservation of elements from the English localization displays the parody's nuanced connection to both incarnations and, as a result, complicates a more reductive reading of *You Say Yamato* and other fanvid parodies created by Western fans of Japanese animation as being entirely opposed to every aspect of any Western localization or any change to the original Japanese property deemed to be inauthentic.

Following in the footsteps of Pollotta and Foglio, other fanvid parodies would soon be created in the mid-to-late 1980s by emerging groups like Pinesalad Productions, Corn Pone Flicks, and Sherbert Productions. Often being created by groups of close friends and fellow fans of Japanese animation, early fanvid parodies thus reflected the practice's collaborative dimension — a feature that would eventually be heightened by the increasingly accessible networked communication afforded by the rising popularity of the Internet, social media platforms, and emerging software applications and technologies like Skype. Pinesalad Productions, for instance, was composed of both male and female members and specialized in editing and re-dubbing episodes from the televised anime and OVA series *Dirty Pair* from 1985 and 1987 as well as *Robotech* (1985), an English localization of the Japanese animation series *Super-dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982-1983).²⁷⁹ Corn Pone Flicks, for their part, created mashups using footage from distinct animation series and live action films like the short *Captain Harlock vs.*

²⁷⁸Laurie Cubbison, “Not Just for Children's Television: Anime and the Changing Editing Practices of American Television Networks,” *Reconstruction* 8.2 (2008), accessed June 12th, 2012, <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/082/cubbison.shtml> [inactive].

²⁷⁹ Specifically, Pinesalad Productions created video parodies of two OVA episodes – *Dirty Pair Does Dishes* (1988) and *Dirty Pair: Revenge of BD* (1989) – initially intended to be 25th and 26th episodes of the television series of *Dirty Pair* (1985-86): “Eek! The Boy in the Manor is a Terminator” and “R-Really! For Beautiful Women, 'Canon' is the Key Word to Escape.” They also created two fanvid parodies – *Viva la Dirty Pair* (1990) and *Fistful of Pasta* (1989) - of the 5th and 6th episodes of the OVA Series of *Dirty Pair* (1987-1988): “And so Nobody's Doing It Anymore” and “Are You Serious! Shocked at the Beach Wedding Panic!,” respectively. With regard to their parody trilogy of *Robotech* created in 1986 and 1987, the first two parts - *How Drugs Won the War* and *You Lying Hussy! I Thought You Were a Man!* - were drawn from episode 18th “Farewell, Big Brother” and episode 33 “A Rainy Night.” The final part of the trilogy *So Glad You Could Stop By for a Sip of Sherry Shut* is based on the combination of the second and first halves of episode 24 and 25 - “Showdown” and “Wedding Bells” - along with a scene from episode 18.

Han Solo (1989), which mashed video from the *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (1978-1979) series with footage of Han Solo piloting the Millennium Falcon from the *Star Wars* trilogy.²⁸⁰ Echoing *You Say Yamato*'s own critique of certain localization decisions when it comes to the adaptation of Japanese animation, the group would also eventually create a three-part comedic documentary series entitled *Bad American Dubbing* (1993-1995) that openly mocked the English dubbing of Japanese film and animation. However, this group was primarily known within early anime fandom for heavily editing and re-dubbing the series-based movie *Arrivederci Space Cruiser Yamato* (1978) and many other *Yamato* sources to create its parody film *The Star Dipwads: Arrivederci Human Race* (1989).²⁸¹ According to the group's notes on the origins of this film and its subsequent sequels,

It began, as so many of these sorts of parodies doubtlessly began, by watching a bit 'o anime and making up stupid dialogue to compensate for our egregious deficiency in actual Japanese.²⁸²

While this comment provides a hypothesis for the North American incarnation of the type of anime fandubbing found in the fanvid parodies of the period, there were diverse potential influences that inspired Western anime fans to take up the practice in the 1980s. For instance, the comical recontextualization of anime characters, plot elements, and popular songs found in fanvid parodies could already be felt within the contemporaneous practices of fan fiction and anime music videos (AMVs). Another potential influence on fanvid parodies was the very controversial and publicly visible localization practices that Western anime fans like Pollotta openly criticized. In particular, it was the 1985 localization of *Macross* into *Robotech* by the production company Harmony Gold that would, according to writer Brian Ruh, draw the greatest attention and cause the most “controversy among fans regarding the editing of the program.”²⁸³ This fan reaction stemmed from the decision of its story editor Carl Macek to increase the number of *Robotech* episodes needed for syndication by

grafting on to the end of *Macross* additional story elements culled from two entirely separate mecha anime shows – *Genesis Climber Mospeada* (1983-1984, Kiko soseiki

²⁸⁰ "Captain Harlock vs Han Solo," Vimeo video, 7:38, posted by "Corn Pone Flicks," July 2nd, 2007, <https://vimeo.com/228576>

²⁸¹ "Star Dipwads: Arrivederci Human Race," streaming video, 50:36, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/star-dipwads-i-arrivaderci-human-race/>

²⁸² "Star Dipwads Supplement," *Corn Pone Flicks*, accessed March 25, 2011, <http://www.cornponeflicks.org/dipsupp.html>

²⁸³ Brian Ruh, "Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity," in *Mechademia*. Volume 5. Ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 36.

Mosupiida) and *Superdimensional Cavalry Southern Cross* (1984, Chojiku kidan Sazan Kurosu).²⁸⁴

In addition, as noted by Ruh and Maureen Furniss, audiovisual representations of sexuality and violence or references to this subject matter were often cut or censored by Macek from the original Japanese anime series in order to meet the broadcast requirements for shows airing in the morning or early afternoon on U.S. television.²⁸⁵ More generally, when animated Japanese television programs were localized for broadcast in North America, similar transformations were often extended to the re-dubbed dialogue of a Japanese animation series, particularly when the original script included references to sexuality or drugs, a process that Markus Nornes characterizes as *adaptive* dubbing.²⁸⁶ Because of their occasional exposure to original Japanese anime episodes through tape exchanges, Western anime fans — who were aware of how English localizations often took considerable license with these episodes' original scripted and audiovisual content — recognized the creative possibilities that can accompany the re-dubbing and editing of the sound track and footage from their cherished franchises, films, and shows. In some cases, the impulse and inspiration to create a fanvid parody would even partly stem from some of the more arbitrary editing decisions undertaken within an American localization of an anime series. For instance, according to Kurt Heiden of fanvid parody group Pinesalad Productions, the guiding idea for their first fanvid parody of *Robotech's* 18th episode emerged around 1985 as a result of an edit within the English localization that rendered the death of the character Roy Fokker incoherent:

When Roy Fokker dies in the "Farewell Big Brother" episode, Carl Macek made some edits to the original Japanese version of that episode by removing the image of Roy with bleeding bullet holes in his back. As a result, the U.S. version cuts from Roy falling off the couch to an image of a shocked Claudia, to the pineapple salad she made for him. [...] other than Claudia's look of surprise, the edit made it look like she poisoned him.²⁸⁷

Inspired by this ambiguous edit and motivated by a love for "Robotech/Macross" itself, one of the female members of Pinesalad Productions asked "What if she had a motive?"²⁸⁸ and, guided

²⁸⁴ Ruh, "Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity," 36.

²⁸⁵ Ruh, "Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity," 40; Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (London: John Libbey & Company, 1998), 204.

²⁸⁶ Abé Markus Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 192-194, 197-198.

²⁸⁷ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

²⁸⁸ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

by this on this idea, the group created a fanvid parody entitled *How Drugs won the War* (1986), the first part of a comedic trilogy wherein Claudia would, in fact, poison Roy Fokker.²⁸⁹ Interestingly, within this first parody, the members of Pinesalad Productions would adopt more adult, equal opportunity style of comedy that playfully engaged with the popular culture of the period including Japanese animation and its localizations. Reflecting a transgressive comedic approach that would run against the tendency of American adaptations of Japanese animation to censor audiovisual references to mature content like violence, sexuality, and drugs in order to satisfy the aforementioned broadcast requirements of U.S. television and be as inoffensive and safe as possible for the younger audiences targeted, the re-dubbed dialogue within this parody by Pinesalad's members converted many of the series' prominent characters like Rick Hunter, Max Sterling, Roy Fokker, and Claudia Grant into "social misfits"²⁹⁰ who would talk openly about sex, violence, and the exchange and use of drugs. Through the parody's clever inversion of the expression "the War on Drugs" within its title, its creative appropriation and editing of various animated episodes, and, more importantly, its subversive references to mature subject matter within its fandubbed dialogue, the character and narrative of *Macross*'s more sanitized American incarnation, *Robotech*, was transformed. An original work of parody was then produced that, through its transformed 'misfit' characters, playfully acknowledged the existence of drugs and sexuality and engaged with them in seeming opposition to the fear, paranoia, and stigmatization often surrounding these topics — some of which was perpetuated by the U.S. Government's contemporaneous "War on Drugs" and the anti-drug messaging increasingly found within media targeted towards younger audiences *as well as* by other past and ongoing social movements, institutions, and policies seeking to remove and censor "inappropriate" and "offensive" content within similar media. For instance, echoing the contemporaneous practice of 'slash fiction' within fan writing, which places same sex characters from popular media into new romantic and sexual relationships with each other, the often campy and tongue-in-cheek dialogue and vocal performances within Pinesalad's first parody subversively situated many of *Robotech*'s characters within mature and fluid relationships with each other that were no longer exclusively heterosexual — in other words, queer relationships that were still stigmatized within Western

²⁸⁹ "How Drugs Won the War," Dailymotion video, 28:38, posted by "PinesaladProductions," accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x20yy8v>

²⁹⁰ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

society at the time and often unseen within its mainstream media productions. All of these changes illustrate the unique and subversive forms of creative transformation being undertaken within the early fanvid parodies of Western anime fandom, which rely on the appropriation of existing media, and heavily undercut the reductive tendency occasionally found within American media industries and Western society to view these types of fan creativity as being merely derivative of established media and as shackled and restricted by them.

This tendency to incorporate more mature subject matter and a more transgressive form of adult humour into Japanese animation and their localized incarnations through fan dubbing was not uncommon within the early fanvid parodies being created within Western anime fandom from the 1980s onwards. Albeit appearing in different forms in accordance with changing social norms and beliefs, this tendency can even be found within twenty first century incarnations of fanvid parody on YouTube such as the abridged series. With regard to the trilogy of parody videos initiated by Pinesalad with *How Drugs Won the War* and the work of the fanvid parody groups that would follow them in the 1990s, however, the transgressive style of anarchic comedy, which was often found within them, emerged at the same historical moment as a diverse range of comedic trends within standup, film, television, and animation started to achieve a greater degree of prominence and influence while also simultaneously contributing to these shifts within comedy and, in some cases, anticipating future ones. More specifically, the occasional appearance of this transgressive "equal opportunity" comedic approach within fanvid parody coincided with the rise in popularity of a style of stand-up comedy exemplified during the 1980s and 1990s by performers like George Carlin and Bill Hicks, which: openly addressed taboo subjects; often deliberately used controversial and provocative language; and frequently engaged in dark, off-colour humour. The above style of adult comedy within fan-produced video parodies like *How Drugs Won the War* with its cast of misfit characters also co-existed with the emergence of a popular campy form of "bad taste" humour within American films and comedies from the 1970s onwards including, for instance, the early cult films of John Waters and their similarly comedic representation and celebration of marginalized outcast figures. At the same time, another potential influence on the transgressive style of comedy found within the early video-based parodies created by Western anime fans was the complementary postmodern, anarchic, and ironic form of humour present within the numerous parody and spoof films that rose to prominence from the 1960s to the 1980s — an increasingly popular type of film comedy

that actively engaged with existing media genres and properties and which was particularly visible within the contemporaneous work of filmmakers like Mel Brooks and David Zucker. Elsewhere, the playful mocking of existing media texts and genres found within these parody films and early fanvid parody themselves was also witnessed on American television in the form of genre spoofs like *Get Smart* (1965-1970), *Police Squad!* (1982), and *Sledge Hammer!* (1986-1988), but also within the irreverent, anarchic, and tongue-in-cheek style of media riffing present with the cult television show *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988-1999) created by Joel Hodgson. Engaging in the direct appropriation of lesser known cult media objects akin to the contemporaneous amateur video parodies being produced within Western anime fans during the period, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* appropriated and screened obscure B-movies and exploitation films, which were often cut down and edited for length during the show. The style and content of these genre films were then openly mocked by the show's comedic cast of human and robot commentators who are presented as silhouetted figures within a darkened film theatre watching these films being projected on a screen. Furthermore, although more adult forms of humour within Western animation did pre-exist the 1980s, the adult sensibility of the humour often found within certain early fanvid parodies within North American fandom like the work of Pinesalad along with their postmodern engagement with existing media also appeared somewhat contemporaneously with a movement in the late 1980s towards comedic animation shows in the U.S. like *The Simpsons* (1989) with a similarly mature and postmodern character. Pinesalad's style of humour also anticipated the more anarchic, adult, and "equal opportunity" forms of animated comedy emerging throughout the 1990s on television networks like MTV, Comedy Central, Fox, and the Cartoon Network with its eventual Adult Swim programming block. Some of these animated comedies exemplifying this more adult form of humour included Mike Judge's *Beavis and Butt-head* (1993-1997), *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* (1994-2007), *Family Guy* (1999-present), *South Park* (1997-present), and *Sealab 2021* (2000-2005). Early Fanvid parodies like those of Pinesalad and their tongue-in-cheek engagement with animated media like *Robotech* and *Dirty Pair* also anticipated another more specific trend within animated comedies like *Beavis and Butt-head*, *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*, and *Sealab 2021*, which is their overt reliance on the creative appropriation, mockery, and transformation of media objects like music videos and Hanna-Barbera cartoons from the 1960s and 1970s. The creative and alternative form of dubbing found within early fanvid parodies, as briefly addressed again later

in this chapter, also co-existed with other professionally-made dubs of Japanese animation series and films produced by American media companies like Macek's Streamline Pictures — professional dubs which frequently took a certain amount of creative and often comedic license in adapting their original scripts and then performing the altered Americanized scripts in English. More interestingly, fanvid parodies by North American anime fans in the mid-to-late 1980s also prefigured the professional production of English-language gag dubs of Japanese animation shows by American media companies — deliberately comedic dubs that strayed considerably from the original source material. Well-known gag dubs of Japanese animation include the irreverent English-language comedic dub of Japanese series like *Kyatto Ninden Teyandee* (1990-1991), which was retitled *Samurai Pizza Cats* in the U.S. and aired in the mid-1990s, but also the gag dub of *Gakko no Kaiden* (2000-2001) titled *Ghost Stories* (2005), which was created by ADV Films and contained an adult style of transgressive humour close to that of earlier fanvid parodies. The reliance on appropriation-based parody and the equal opportunity, irreverent, and transgressive approach to comedy — both of which are often jointly embodied by earlier fanvid parody groups like Pinesalad — thus emerged at the intersection of these complementary trends within comedy while also simultaneously contributing to them and anticipating others.

However, despite possessing similar traits as some of these contemporaneous and future forms of performative, live action, and animated comedy, it should be noted that the styles and types of humour and comedy found within early fanvid parodies — while consistently referential, postmodern, and irreverent in character — would also vary significantly from group to group and could sometimes shift within the parodies themselves including those from Pinesalad. They would also change, to varying degrees, throughout the work of individual parody groups as their members grew older, their personal interests and tastes changed, and they were influenced by new comedic trends and changing social norms within North America throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Lastly, despite the critical undercurrent that is often present within early fanvid parodies when it comes to the inauthentic localization of Japanese animation undertaken by industry figures like Macek or the critical stance which frequently seemed to accompany their occasionally transgressive approach to comedy, later sections of this chapter will demonstrate how fanvid parodies do not actually exist in an overtly or purely antagonistic and critical relationship with animated Japanese shows and their Americanized adaptations or their respective creators. Like the commentators on *Mystery Science Theater*

3000 and their playful riffing of low-budget genre cinema, the irreverent parody-based humour and creativity seen within video-based parodies created by Western anime fans are frequently marked, shaped, and driven by the passionate affection and appreciation that they hold for the original works of Japanese animation which they transform, including, to a lesser degree, their often badly Americanized incarnations.

Nevertheless, as implicitly felt within the work of Pinesalad, a critical stance on inauthentic or sanitized American localizations of Japanese animation remains present within the work of early fanvid parody groups in spite of the palpable affection that tends to co-exist with it. Exemplifying this tendency to criticize the process of localization, the fanvid parody group Sherbert Productions would create a parody of the first *Dirty Pair* OVA episode entitled *Dirty Pair: the Arrest of Mr. Macek* in 1989 that would openly mock Macek for his efforts to subject Western anime fans to his inauthentic localization of *Macross*. According to Nornes, within the parody's constructed narrative, Macek, portrayed by a prison warden from the OVA episode, "has gone around the country to various conventions and kid-napped fans and brought them to his preview house/prison on the planet Jupiter, forcing them to watch *Robotech* until he gets a favorable review."²⁹¹ In light of this criticism of localization within early fanvid parodies, Nornes is correct when he asserts that fandubbed parodies "are done by people who have an intense relationship to the original," even as they embed its footage "in a complex network of current events and popular culture."²⁹² An affective attachment or appreciation for the original Japanese animation series, whose footage they appropriate, is often what compels creators in North America to create fanvid parodies within the anime community and, in the process, participate more substantively with their favourite shows. The fandubbing element of these video-based parodies, in effect, allows Western anime fans to aurally inhabit the narrative world of the Japanese series they cherish through the voices of its characters, thus becoming another means by which they have, according to Antonia Levi, made anime "their own."²⁹³ In a post on their website solidifying its status as a group of individuals focused on the production of original amateur content and defending itself against their misrepresentation as a fansubbing enterprise, the fanvid parody group Corn Pone Flicks would even declare that their "whole goddamned

²⁹¹ Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*, 196.

²⁹² Nornes, *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*, 196.

²⁹³ Antonia Levi, "The Americanization of Anime and Manga," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements With Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 43.

raison d'être is creating our own stuff” and that, rather than fansubbing the content of copyright owners, they were motivated to “make something that is actually theirs” and more transformative.²⁹⁴ When talking about the desire to create a parody with higher production values, one of the leading creators of a later parody group CDS Productions, Bobby Beaver, would also state that he “wanted to own parody dubbing” like he owned his equally transformative anime music videos (AMV) that he created earlier, but, in contrast to Murray, he meant it in the sense of leaving his mark within this particular creative realm of Western anime fandom.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, while being motivated by their deep affective passion for a Japanese anime series and the desire to transform it into a work that they could call their own, by altering its audiovisual content and injecting it with Western cultural references, these parodies echo the *adaptive* dubbing within localizations. Many fanvid parodies from the early 1990s onwards even implicitly commented on the tendency of English localizations like *Robotech* (1985) and *Voltron* (1984-1985) to combine separate anime series in order to elongate their narratives. For instance, around the year 1990, the cast members of the fan parody group Seishun Shitemasu created a fandubbed comedy entitled *Laputa II: The Sequel*, which appropriated the first four episodes from the series *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990-1991) in order to create an unofficial extension of Hayao Miyazaki's film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986).²⁹⁶ Referring more directly to *Voltron*'s localization, they also produced the parody *Voltron Force: The Lost Years* (1995), which appropriates and re-dubs footage from one episode of the unrelated animated series *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* (1972).²⁹⁷ This occasional likeness and proximity between fanvid parody and official localizations is accentuated by the aforementioned existence of more loose, professional 'gag' dubs such as Streamline Pictures' comedic dub of the *Dirty Pair: Project Eden* (1987) film in 1994, Saban Entertainment's irreverent dub of *Samurai Pizza Cats* (1990-1991) in 1996, or A.D. Vision's later comedic dub of *Ghost Stories* (2000) and *Cromartie*

²⁹⁴ “A Note from the CPF Director Guy,” *Corn Pone Flicks*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.cornponeflicks.org/editorial2.html>

²⁹⁵ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

²⁹⁶ “Laputa II: The Sequel,” streaming video, 36:32, accessed August 3rd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/laputa-ii-the-sequel/>; For information about the parody in question, see Peter Payne, “Laputa II: The Sequel,” *Seishun*, March 2005, accessed May 5th, 2016, <http://www.seishun.org/2005/03/laputa-ii-sequel.html> [site discontinued]

²⁹⁷ “Voltron Force: The Lost Episode,” streaming video, 23:49, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/voltron-force-the-lost-years/>; For information on this parody's production, see Josh, “Voltron II: The Lost Episode,” *Seishun*, March 2005, accessed May 5th, 2016, <http://www.seishun.org/2005/03/voltron-ii-lost-episode.html> [site discontinued]

High School (2003-2004) released in North America in 2005 and 2006, respectively, with its edgier form of humour. This proximity is reinforced by fanvid creators like Pinesalad who keep the Americanized names and elements of localizations like *Robotech* within their parodies.

While these parallels and the criticism of American licensees' localization strategies remain an important part of the history of North American fanvid parodies, the early incarnations of the practice and the distribution of fanvid parodies from the 1980s onwards were also significantly conditioned by the material constraints existing at the time. For instance, in order to create a transformative parody of *Robotech*'s 18th episode, "Farewell Big Brother," Pinesalad Productions needed to use an RCA VCR with an Audio Dub feature, which allowed custom music to be recorded on one track while new dialogue was recorded on a separate track with the improvisational use of headphones plugged into the Mic input, at least until a microphone was eventually adopted.²⁹⁸ Moreover, sound effects and the dubbing itself were initially vocally performed live by Pinesalad's cast of non-professional voice actors until, with the help of a mixer, sound FX libraries began to be used.²⁹⁹ According to founder Peter Payne, the fanvid parody group Seishun Shitemasu, for their part, initially used a "high-end four-head VCR with audio and video dubbing capabilities" from Hitachi to create their fanvid parodies.³⁰⁰ For the more complicated *Star Dipwads*, Corn Pone Flicks would use a similar method using a four-head "old mono VCR" and an "old boom-box to record" audio after rewiring one of its members' "entertainment center" to allow the group "to dub new sound onto old video."³⁰¹ Moreover, although more elaborate editing and intricate combinations of footage from different episodes of animated television series and other media sources were accomplished with the two VCR method within some early fanvid work like *You Say Yamato* and *Star Dipwads*, other fan parodies like Pinesalad's *Robotech* and *Dirty Parody* episodes often resorted to the simpler process of appropriating and re-dubbing entire episodes, an approach possibly adopted due to the time-consuming nature of editing via the VHS process.³⁰² As a result, some early fanvid parodies

²⁹⁸ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

²⁹⁹ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

³⁰⁰ Peter Payne, "Laputa II: The Sequel," *Seishun*, March 2005, accessed May 5th, 2016, <http://www.seishun.org/2005/03/laputa-ii-sequel.html> [site discontinued]

³⁰¹ "Star Dipwads: Arrivederci, Human Race," *Corn Pone Flicks*, accessed May 2nd, 2015, <http://www.cornponeflicks.org/dipsupp.html>

³⁰² However, as already stated in a previous footnote, the final part of their trilogy parodying *Robotech*, *So Glad You Could Stop By for a Sip of Sherry Slut*, does feature more transformative editing and is based on the fusion of the second and first halves of episode 24 and 25 along with a scene from episode 18.

frequently featured minimal editing. Conversely, during its own beginnings, Sherbert Productions initially used costly “3/4 inch video editing equipment,” an audio board, and microphones accessible to member Corellian Jones at a Pasadena City College studio and his workplace to edit and produce the master tape of *Dirty Pair: the Arrest of Mr. Macek* (1989), although his access to this technology would prove to be fleeting.³⁰³ For Bobby Beaver of CDS Productions, his group’s parody *Record of Lodoss Warz II*, which was created in May 1996 using taped footage from the *Record of Lodoss War* OVA series (1990-1991),³⁰⁴ relied on a “16 track Tascam system” and “analog tape” recorder with a “DBX noise reduction” device that was accessible from Texas’s Alvin Community College.³⁰⁵ As detailed extensively by Beaver, the process of creating a fanvid parody using such a system and synchronizing the video to the audio could often get very complicated, risky, and labour intensive:

.... we drew a line on the tape with a marker and lined it up with one of the guides on the recorder. When I produced the video master, I integrated a synchronization screen at the beginning, with consecutive frames numbered from -15 to +15, so it was possible to "tilt" the audio by as much as a half second in either direction if the sync wasn't perfect. Obviously the tape had to be precisely the correct speed, so we had a tone at the beginning of the audio tape and we tuned it with a guitar tuner. The only downside is that you couldn't just start recording anywhere... you had to start the video and audio at the same time and just wait until it was time to say your line and hope nobody screws up. This only worked because the entire dub clocked in at 16:30.

Obviously for a dub, you need a vocal track, a music track, and a sound effects track. The vocal track and music track can have some leeway in them, but the sound effects track had to be precisely locked in to the video footage. Therefore, I recorded the sound effects onto the linear audio track on the master video tape. I kept the hiss to minimal levels by using a DBX noise reduction unit when I recorded them. The music tracks were a little trickier, because I did not have a computer. The end solution was to copy music from CD or tape, copying every other song on each pass. That gave me enough time to cue the next song up and have it waiting when it was time. There was some very tricky music editing which I had to do through an old-style cassette deck (with piano keys). The vocal track was recorded over the multitude of tracks on the 16 track recorder itself, and the music and sound effects tracks were added to the tape prior to mastering. It met the goal of being a high quality dub... a dub you can listen to with headphones and be pleased with the sound quality.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ “How Sherbert Productions Began,” *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, last modified on January 24th, 1997, accessed on February 9th, 2016, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/shrbegan.htm>; “Dirty Pair: The Arrest of Macek,” *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, last modified on March 14th, 2009, accessed on February 9th, 2016, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/dp1prod.htm>

³⁰⁴ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, October 6th, 2017.

³⁰⁵ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

³⁰⁶ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

In a subsequent email conversation, Beaver would correct the above description and state that the consecutive frames for this video master were numbered -10 to 10, and not -15 to 15.³⁰⁷ For the recording of fanvid parodies, however, Beaver tended to use “some pretty decent dynamic microphones (all from Radio Shack) going into a mixer,” which was “coupled to a compressor/limiter” and then “hooked to whatever device we are using to record the audio, whether it be a recording device or a computer.”³⁰⁸ For his 1998 fanvid parody *Koko wa Otaku*, recording was done using a “portable minidisc recorder”³⁰⁹ in combination with “a 8mm TV/VCR providing the source footage,” a “microphone mixer,” and a “compressor/limiter.”³¹⁰ Prior to the emergence of easier-to-use, cheaper, and more accessible technologies and software applications for audiovisual editing and recording, in order to create transformative fanvid parodies that they could truly call their own, earlier Western anime fans thus needed to have access to expensive technological tools or enough money to purchase them and they had to possess or acquire the experience, skill, and knowledge required to tactically use them for this purpose and succeed.

Furthermore, the production of fanvid parodies required a considerable investment of time and money. According to Beaver, the total cost for the equipment necessary for his parodies — microphones, audio mixers and recorders, video and audio processing equipment, VCRs, capture cards, etc — was approximately over six thousand U.S. dollars.³¹¹ When Sherbert Productions lost access to the 3/4 VTR U-matic editing equipment and decided to acquire their own audio-visual equipment to create their second 1990 fanvid parody entitled *Urusei Yatsura: Attack Sherbert*, which used footage from the *Urusei Yatsura* (1981-1986) television series, it initially cost them approximately \$3,500.³¹² Thus, the prohibitive cost when it came to the purchase of the equipment required to create fanvid parodies and the difficulty of having access to these production tools could restrict some early anime fans in the West from partaking in their production. In addition to the potentially restrictive effect of these cost-related constraints, the distribution channels available for fanvid parody creators to circulate their work were also

³⁰⁷ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, October 6th, 2017.

³⁰⁸ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

³⁰⁹ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, October 6th, 2017.

³¹⁰ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, May 4th, 2016.

³¹¹ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 11, 2016; Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, October 7th, 2017.

³¹² “URUSEI YATSURA: Attack Sherbert,” *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, last modified on October 1st, 1996, accessed on February 9th, 2016, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/uyasprod.htm>

limited by the material constraints of the period before the arrival of high-bandwidth internet and social media platforms like YouTube. More specifically, they were initially confined to physical sites that included local or college-based anime clubs and science fiction conventions where they were screened. More predominantly though, they were distributed through tape exchange networks where, according to Scott Melzer — the lead creator behind the fanvid parody group NoN.D.E. Fan Films — fanvid parodies were circulated by the distributors of fan-subtitled tapes of Japanese animation and they initially gained exposure by being sent in the mail alongside them as tapes, which would then be further copied and exchanged by fellow fans.³¹³ For instance, Pinesalad’s initial *Robotech* parody was initially copied from their master tape and distributed among friends until it began to be shown at local anime clubs within Orange County, CA and screened at conventions such as Baycon in San Jose, CA.³¹⁴ Similarly, Sherbert Productions would screen their parody *Dirty Pair: The Arrest of Mr. Macek* on May 14th, 1989 for the EDC Pasadena Anime Club and on July 1st, 1989 at the science fiction convention Westercon in Anaheim, California.³¹⁵ Within these material sites, VHS-based fanvid parodies existed in a less visible informal realm that was not as immediately vulnerable to the formal enforcement and control strategies of a wider discursive and regulatory apparatus designed to control the sphere of cultural and media production — an apparatus that connected intellectual property law to corporate decisions relating to emerging technologies and copyright policy. In contrast, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the more public and visible fanvid parodies now appearing in the form of abridged series on YouTube since 2006 would be more regularly subject to the formal and indirect strategies of control emerging from the twenty first incarnation of this apparatus, which is composed of a relational network of discursive statements, legislative changes to copyright law, and, lastly, platform design decisions and policy choices undertaken by the owners of social media platforms and other media corporations connected to them.

Moreover, after the early work of Pinesalad Productions, Corn Pone Flicks, and Sherbert Productions, which would continue past the late 1980s, other parody groups emerged and helped

³¹³ Scott Melzer, e-mail message to author, March 24th, 2016; Scott Melzer, e-mail message to author, October 4th, 2017.

³¹⁴ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, April 4, 2016.

³¹⁵ “How Sherbert Productions Began,” *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, last modified on January 24th, 1997, accessed May 1st, 2016, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/shrbegan.htm>; “Dirty Pair: The Arrest of Mr. Macek,” *Sherbert Productions*, last modified on March 14th, 2009, accessed on June 11th, 2014, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/dp1prod.htm>

to carry the practice into the 1990s and 2000s while making occasional use of alternative recording technologies, physical media, and software tools such as video processing or capturing devices, laserdiscs, and, in some cases, editing and compositing applications. As a result, the audiovisual quality and transformative nature of fanvid parodies dramatically increased and they began to feature more compositing effects and editing as well as an increase in the synching and manipulation of lip movements with dialogue. For instance, CDS Productions' parody of the group's own community of fandub creators and their creative process within *Koko wa Otaku* (1998) features a considerable amount of editing and some image manipulation. Mostly, the 40 minute parody edits audiovisual material from the first episode of the animated OVA series *Here is Greenwood* (1991-1993), but also from a large number of other series and media sources including the role-playing video game *Final Fantasy VII* (1997).³¹⁶ In one interesting moment of the parody, live action footage of posters and a performer's legs meant to represent those of a fictional otaku is composited into the foreground while *Here is Greenwood* animation is integrated into a background layer. Recreating a scene from the original episode of *Here is Greenwood*, this form of compositing uses the spread-out legs as a visual frame for the animated action occurring in the background in order to emphasize the initially jarring encounter of the parody's protagonist, Kevin, with the alien world of otaku and fandubbing culture. Following the live action footage taken from the dealers room of the Project A-kon 7 convention, Beaver accomplished this particular composite image in the original version of this parody using live action footage shot in the kitchen of member Dave Mayeur along with a VCR, a laserdisc (LD) of the television episode, a laserdisc player, and two video processing devices, one of which, the Videonics MX-1, only became available in 1994:

I had two video processing devices at the time, a Vidicraft SEG100 and a Videonics MX-1. The SEG100 is an analog video mixer that has the ability to mix two video sources, but only if those two sources are genlocked. In other words, at the same video synchronization. The MX-1 is a digital video mixer that has the ability to genlock video sources, but its ability to mix video is limited to up, down, side to side, and so forth. So I used the MX-1 to genlock the two video sources (in this case, a video tape and the output from my LD player), set the MX-1 to push the LD footage where it needed to be on screen, ran the two outputs to channels A & B of the SEG100, then set up for a manual center wipe and then tilted the wipe to match the angle of his legs. Then added a little bit of softness so it wouldn't be so obvious what was being done.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ To view a later 2009 remastered version of this 1998 parody, see "Koko Wa Otaku," streaming video, 40:36, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/koko-wa-otaku/>

³¹⁷ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, November 25th, 2015.

Afterwards, when constructing a remaster of the parody in 2009 using editing and compositing programs like “Adobe Premiere 6.0 along with Photoshop CS2,” Beaver used “a still of the source footage” from the kitchen shoot to “create a matte of the area between his legs” only to then undertake the “chroma key” technique “to insert the LD footage” from the *Here is Greenwood* episode into this area.³¹⁸ Emerging analog and digital technologies thus enabled a greater degree of transformative creativity from fanvid parody creators from the 1990s onwards.

Exemplifying the greater range of creative transformations and audiovisual manipulations afforded and facilitated more easily by these technological and software advances within the work of emerging fanvid creators in the early 2000s is the fanvid comedy entitled *This is Otakudom* (2001) by later fanvid parody group NoN.D.E. (Not Not Digital Editing) Fan Films — a film that, like *Koko wa Otaku* before it, satirized North American otaku fan culture. While its creators previously named themselves N.D.E (Not Digital Editing) Films when they were producing anime music videos (AMVs) using the two VCR method in the 1990s, the altered acronym, Not Not Digital Editing, within the parody group's evolving name — which became NoN.D.E Films and, eventually, NoN.D.E. Fan Films — and its deliberate use of a double negative would signal the group's transition to computer-based digital editing software from 2000 onwards. Taking advantage of these technological developments within its production, *This is Otakudom* possesses a closer synchronization of a character's lip flaps with their spoken dialogue than some earlier fanvid parodies, but, more radically, it also edited footage from over 40 different sources of animation, the majority of which was from Japan and ranged from television series and original video animation (OVAs) to full length-films. The bulk of the parody's footage, however, stemmed from the televised anime series *Fushigi Yugi* (1995-1996).³¹⁹ With all of this visual material from divergent series and films, NoN.D.E. Fan Films constructs an animated mockumentary focusing on the pilgrimage of a fictional group of American otaku to the Baltimore-based anime convention Otakon. In one particularly memorable sequence, footage from the animated series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) is appropriated to transform its patriarchal character Gendo Ikari into a fictional director named Martin Cinemacher who meets with a panel of American representatives from the animation

³¹⁸ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, November 25th, 2015.

³¹⁹ "This is Otakudom," streaming video, 52:09, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/this-is-otakudom/>

industry. With the help of re-dubbed footage from televised anime series like *Giant Robo* (1992-1998), he confronts them with fictionalized evidence of the infantilization and Americanization of Japanese anime within localizations. Similarly, Studio Sokodei in their own popular parody *Evangelion: Re-Death* (2000) extensively edits disparate visual material from the *Evangelion* franchise along with scenes from the *Pokemon* television series (1997-present). It also composites live action footage of plush toys of *Pokemon's* Pikachu and Ryo-ohki from the *Tenchi Muyo!* (1992-2005) franchise with animation and backgrounds from *Evangelion* in order to simulate a battle between giant monsters.³²⁰ Shortly afterwards, the fan parody group refined its transformative aesthetics within another reflexive fanvid parody about otaku culture named *Fanboy Bebop* (2002), which edits footage from over 30 sources of Japanese animation from films and television shows to OVAs, although the animated television series *Cowboy Bebop* (1998) would be its key object of appropriation.³²¹ Moreover, it also composites inserts of posters and banners into drawn backgrounds to help represent the fictional otaku convention ASUX around which the fanvid parody revolves. Through these radical transformations, the original protagonists of *Cowboy Bebop* undergo an excursion to ASUX where they thwart the terrorist plot of disgruntled anime fan Chip Zahoy — represented by series villain Vicious — to rid otaku culture of contemporary fans who, in his eyes, only consume low quality popular anime. The more elaborate editing, textual appropriation, and image compositing present in this later work of NoN.D.E. Fan Films and Studio Sokodei were partly facilitated by fans' increasing access to technologies like video and image editing software like Adobe Photoshop and Premiere, video capturing devices that allowed footage from various forms of physical media to be digitized, and software applications that allowed the digital contents of DVDs to be directly ripped onto a computer.³²² Thus, while footage from tapes were still captured as in the original cut of Studio Sokodei's *Evangelion: Re-Death*, higher quality footage of anime from laserdiscs and DVDs was

³²⁰ A reshot version of this sequence was constructed for the later 2004 remaster of this fanvid parody entitled *Evangelion ReDeath Redux*. See "Evangelion ReDeath," streaming video, 34:01, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/evangelion-redeath/>. For a detailed description of the changes made to the original within this remaster, see "ReDeath to Redux," *Sokodei.com*, February 10th, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090210083743/http://sokodei.com:80/redeath/redeath-to-redux/>

³²¹ "Fanboy Bebop," streaming video, 40:12, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/fanboy-bebop/>

³²² For instance, exemplifying this adoption of new software tools, on its now defunct website's FAQ page, Studio Sokodei once stated that, in order to produce their fanvid parodies, it "edits in Adobe Premiere" and uses "Adobe After Effects and Photoshop for visual effects shots." See "FAQ," *Sokodei.com*, August 2nd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090802153731/http://sokodei.com:80/faq/>

also increasingly captured and transferred via this emerging array of devices and software tools within their later work and that of NoN.D.E. Fan Films after which it would then be converted into a digital video file on a computer that can be more easily manipulated within an editing or compositing program.

Despite the increase in transformative possibilities brought forth by the growing access of fans to new technologies and software programs, the minimal access to broadband internet or online distribution platforms for user-generated video content in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a core obstacle to the online circulation of fanvid parodies. As a result, once completed digitally, many of these videos were exported back onto an S-VHS VCR player to be distributed on tape between fans or premiered at the anime conventions emerging in the 1990s, at least until DVDs, social media platforms, and file sharing sites were eventually adopted and used as new means to distribute them. For instance, Studio Sokodei would even premiere some of their fanvid parodies like *Evangelion ReDeath* (2000), *Fanboy Bebop* (2002), and *Nescaflowne* (2003) at the anime convention Anime Con in Santa Clara, California in the early 2000s.³²³ Given the large amount of intertextual references to Japanese animation, anime fandom, and other fan-produced content contained within fanvid parodies, conventions remain cherished cultural spaces where anime fans can exhibit their creative work and knowledge about animated Japanese productions to receptive audiences who share this familiarity with Japanese animation and fan culture as well as a profound affection for them. Due to this shared knowledge and affect, such audiences can better understand and appreciate these parodies' complex referential humour and the very specific ways in which the original texts being appropriated are being parodied while also being more inclined to respond to them with greater enthusiasm and affective passion. In his own work, Lawrence Eng has emphasized how Western anime fandom's commitment to networked spaces like conventions — whether they are face-to-face or online, formal or informal — enhances this process of knowledge communication among fans.³²⁴ Achieving a form of cultural

³²³ "Evangelion ReDeath," *Sokodei.com*, May 9th, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090509235201/http://sokodei.com:80/redeath/>; "Fanboy Bebop," *Sokodei.com* January 6th, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090106032759/http://sokodei.com/fbbb/>; "Nescaflowne," *Sokodei.com*, July 21st, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090721003637/http://sokodei.com:80/nescaflowne>

³²⁴ Lawrence Eng, "Anime and Manga Fandom as Networked Culture," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, eds. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 165-176; Lawrence Eng, "Strategies of Engagement: Discovering, Defining, and Describing Otaku Culture in the United States," in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, eds. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and

distinction through the open display of their aesthetic skills and knowledge is thus another potential motive to produce anime fan parodies and exhibit them within such material spaces as well as to continue circulating them within these locations even as alternative means of distribution would emerge. This motive co-exists with the more affective motivations potentially driving fanvid parody creators to create and distribute their work among fans within conventions and clubs such as a sincere affection for the animated Japanese productions they appropriate and for the participatory and communal otaku culture these texts cultivate in the West — affect that can often inform and drive their emotional desire to engage with them more substantively and share their love of these texts more widely. Complemented by this affect for Japanese animation and the culture which this type of media fosters, these creators can also be driven to produce their fanvid parodies and distribute them within such physical and communal spaces due to a similarly affective desire to participate in — and to belong to and be a part of — a larger community of equally passionate Japanese animation fans. By circulating their affect for specific animated media from Japan to other fans or reinforcing the pre-existing affective relationship of these fans to these texts, the labour that creators of fanvid parodies like Studio Sokodei invest in their production and their continued distribution embodies Hardt and Negri's conception of immaterial labour, which was previously described in the introduction. The immaterial products of the labour that is always involved within the production and distribution of fanvid parodies from the past to the present — such as the affective relationships they cultivate with audiences and between viewers and the animated Japanese texts they appropriate — are highly beneficial to the North American entertainment companies who license the distribution, translation, and localization rights to Japanese animation properties because they function as an independent and unpaid form of indirect advertising for these licensed media acquisitions. However, as a result of fanvid parody creators' partly affective and partially conscious compulsion to display their creativity and share their emotional love for Japanese animation by circulating and screening their content amidst an enthusiastic and passionate community of like-minded fans, the visibility of fanvid videos continued to increase until it began to openly intersect with the content regulation strategies of American and Japanese animation companies and the larger proprietary capitalistic apparatus of which they were a part.

Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 100-101.

Fanvid Parodies and the Threat of Copyright Law from the 1980s to the 2000s

For example, despite the seeming invisibility of early tape-based fanvid parodies and the post-1976 codification of the fair use defence within the Copyright Act of 1976, which went into effect in 1978, the threat of copyright enforcement to the practice was never entirely absent from the 1980s onwards. It was in this immediate context that the *Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc.* (1984) Supreme Court case, otherwise known as the 'Betamax case,' occurred and addressed whether or not Sony was liable for the copyright infringement of the users of its video recording technology because the latter could facilitate it by allowing them to copy third party media content. Through the lawsuit that resulted in this Supreme Court case, media corporations like Universal City Studios Inc. and Disney sought to go beyond a more direct approach to obstructing individual instances of copyright infringement and, instead, completely stop all copying of their media content via Sony's Betamax technology by rendering the company liable for all of its infringing uses. The decision reached in this case ultimately ruled that the copying of television programs via recording devices like Betamax video tape recorders for later domestic viewership was fair use and not an act of copyright infringement and, as a result, their manufacturers and the producers of similar technologies like VCRs could not be held liable for copyright infringement.³²⁵ Setting an important precedent, this decision would lay the groundwork that would provide some degree of protection to later technological developments that afford both infringing and non-infringing uses — technologies ranging from personal computers and software applications with CD and DVD burning capacities to the Web-based platforms like YouTube that are the primary home of the abridged series format and their fanvid parody episodes. This decision would also obviously enable early fanvid creators such as Pinesalad Productions to continue appropriating the recorded footage of Japanese animation shows through taped VCR recordings and then copy, produce, and circulate their work on VHS tapes. Moreover, foreshadowing DVD copy protection measures and the anti-circumvention restrictions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 and their applicability to software tools that would allow users to circumvent such digital rights management strategies, the Betamax case would also highlight how media corporations like Universal City Studios and Disney sought to control particular uses of emerging media technologies through a legal strategy

³²⁵ *Sony Corporation of America v Universal City Studios*, 464 US 417 at 442 (Supreme Court 1984). Available at: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/464/417/case.html>

— one which would eventually become part of a larger apparatus seeking to limit and control such uses through copyright law, the judicial system, corporate policy, and technological design choices. As will be demonstrated later, a slightly different incarnation of this regulatory apparatus with more flexible control strategies would become dominant in twenty first century online media and coincide with the increasing visibility and rising numbers of fanvid parodies within online platforms like YouTube.

Nevertheless, even though the early fanvid parodies that primarily circulated within anime clubs and conventions via tapes were less visible to the more traditional media corporations driving this regulatory apparatus, the threat of copyright enforcement would occasionally manifest itself within these spaces, albeit only rarely. It was also never forgotten by fanvid parody creators who tended to respect the distribution rights of American entertainment companies to the animated Japanese content they license. For instance, at the 1992 edition of Anime Expo, Phillip Sral, a key member of Sherbert Productions, was asked by Robert Woodhead of AnimEigo, an American company that acquires the English-language rights of anime, to not make any additional copies of their 1990 parody *Urusei Yatsura: Attack Sherbert* were made and to give him a personal copy, an encounter that motivated the group to enact a strict no copy policy for their parodies despite their fair use and non-profit status.³²⁶ The anxiety of such industry figures like Woodhead over fan works could partially stem from a feared, but highly unlikely reality — elsewhere suggested by cultural theorist Otsuka Eiji — where participatory cultural creation renders professional media and its resulting parodies in direct competition with each other for consumer attention and money.³²⁷ In contrast to Woodhead and his potential fear of the above possibility, Carl Macek, after being shown an episode of Pinesalad Productions's *Robotech* parody, displayed no immediate concern about copyright.³²⁸ Macek's tolerance of the existence of fanvid parodies appropriating licensed content, in fact, would parallel that of other American companies dedicated to the dubbing and localization of Japanese animation series and films while Woodhead's response was anomalous. Supporting the rare

³²⁶ Phillip Sral, "Sherbert Copy Distribution Policy," *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, March 20, 2000, Accessed March 25th, 2011. <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/shrcopyp.htm>; "URUSEI YATSURA: Attack Sherbert," *Sherbert Fan Parodies*, last modified on October 1st, 1996, accessed on February 9th, 2016, <http://www.sherbertfanparodies.org/uyasprod.htm>

³²⁷ Otsuka Eiji, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," in *Mechademia*. Volume 5. Ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 112.

³²⁸ Kurt Heiden, e-mail message to author, 4 April 2016.

character of such direct forms of contact with such rights owners, Corn Pone Flicks' member Jeff Tatarek in a post within the famous recs.arts.anime newsgroup for English-language anime fans would claim in 1995 to have never been told to stop the use of copyrighted material in his fanvid parodies by figures like Woodhead.³²⁹ Nevertheless, while voicing his intention to “keep doing parodies with whatever I can find until I get a cease and desist order from a company who tells me to stop using their stuff,” he would also state that, if asked to stop by a copyright owner of a given media property, he would immediately “drop their stuff from my list of usable sources, stop distributing anything that may have their stuff in it or else edit around it, and keep making new projects with what remains.”³³⁰ Sral and Tatarek thus defer to copyright and license owners to a significant degree, but they are, nevertheless, compelled to continue the production and distribution of more fanvid parodies for a variety of reasons including their affection for the appropriated media texts, even if a limit on copies is adopted. In reality, however, early fanvid parody creators were rarely contacted by the American companies who held the rights to the Japanese properties they appropriated, nor their original copyright owners.

Partially supporting this reality in a 2005 article for the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, scholar Sean Leonard would foreground how, during the 1980s and early 1990s, the general response from Japanese representatives of animation studios to the exchange of fan-subtitled tapes of anime in the U.S. was one of ignorance.³³¹ On one hand, these representatives, Leonard contends, strategically ignored fan uses of their products in order to better target “major television syndicates.”³³² In contrast to the strategic ignorance of these representatives, the Japanese studio heads of the period, however, were heavily uninformed of this particular fan appropriation of their material.³³³ I would argue that this kind of strategic ignorance extended to the fanvid parodies of the 1980s and 1990s and to the American licensees of Japanese animation content. However, members of the American animation industry, which acquired the rights to anime series for U.S. broadcast, did begin to be concerned with fan uses of copyrighted material

³²⁹ Jeff Tatarek, comment on “[FANS] Fan Parodies,” rec.arts.anime Forum, comment posted on September 29th, 1995, accessed May 1st, 2016,

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/rec.arts.anime/fandubbing/rec.arts.anime/HRagRYyrZR8/J0ojFewfQj0J>

³³⁰ Jeff Tatarek, comment on “[FANS] Fan Parodies,” rec.arts.anime Forum, comment posted on September 29th, 1995, accessed May 1st, 2016,

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/rec.arts.anime/fandubbing/rec.arts.anime/HRagRYyrZR8/J0ojFewfQj0J>

³³¹ Sean Leonard, “Progress against the Law: Anime and Fandom, with the Key of Globalization of Culture,” *International Journal Of Cultural Studies*, 8.3 (Sept. 2005): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877905055679>.

³³² *Ibid.*, 288.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 288.

in the 1990s as evidenced by the representatives at Anime Expo '93 who were worried about “pre-existing copies eating into profits.”³³⁴ Moreover, on May 22nd, 1995, a collective of local companies formed the Japanese Animation Industry Legal Enforcement Division (J.A.I.L.E.D.) in order to prosecute the distribution of bootlegged copies of licensed series, although its influence would soon fade.³³⁵ While more direct than the Betamax case, this new restrictive approach by the media industry to controlling the unauthorized uses of their work again reflects the legal component of the regulatory apparatus of control strategies taking shape in the 1990s prior to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998. In response to the organization's intimidating and hyperbolic rhetoric, however, CDS Productions would mock J.A.I.L.E.D within their parody *Terminator 4: The Industry Strikes Back* (1996), which used footage from Hayao Miyazaki's animated film about the gentleman thief Lupin *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979) and the *3x3 Eyes* franchise in combination with comedically altered subtitles. Copyright enforcement was also the partial target of their fanvid comedy *Musical Downloader Girl: Pretty Sue-Me*. The parody dub was eventually completed in 2012, nine years after a rough cut was screened in 2003 at Otakon, and it appropriates footage from the animated television series *Magical Girl Pretty Sammy* (1995-1997) in order to represent the music industry's excessive response to online file-sharing.³³⁶ Co-existing with this criticism, however, the comedy also contains, within it, a playful amount of mockery also directed towards the average citizen engaging in the illegal downloading of music online and their often contrived rationalizations of this act. However, according to Patten, the members of organizations like J.A.I.L.E.D, which were devoted to enforcing copyright would often unofficially “wink at unauthorized videos if they are non-commercial” out of fear of angering fans.³³⁷ Lending credence to this assertion, Woodhead, a member of J.A.I.L.E.D, explained the unlikelihood of prosecutions against the creators of fandub parodies to the rec.arts.anime newsgroup by stating that it would not be “cost/PR effective.”³³⁸ Likewise, according to fanvid creators like Beaver, Matt Greenfield of American anime distributor AD

³³⁴ Ibid., 294.

³³⁵ Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 years of essays and reviews*, 119-120.

³³⁶ "Musical Downloader Girl Pretty Sue-me," streaming video, 36:48, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/musical-downloader-girl-pretty-sue-me/>

³³⁷ Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 years of essays and reviews*, 120.

³³⁸ Robert Woodhead, comment posted on "J.A.I.L.E.D. - Anti-Piracy Organization," rec.arts.anime Forum, comment posted on May 28th 1995, accessed March 28th, 2011, http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.anime/browse_thread/thread/87e0b96ac7e34144/3a7195f35062b0e1?q=JAILLED,+WOODHEAD.

Vision would tolerate fandub parodies, but they would still caution their creators against openly informing them of their use of some of the animated content, which they have licensed, claiming that, if they were made aware of it, they would be obligated to sue for infringement.³³⁹ Thus, American entertainment corporations which buy the North American distribution rights to Japanese animation content and the organizations that represent them like J.A.I.L.E.D were highly reluctant to stop fans from producing non-profit fanvid parodies amidst the sudden rise of Japanese animation fandom in North America and often openly tolerated them if they did happen to learn about them, although, as asserted by Beaver, other industry figures like Greenfield still sought to remain unaware of such fanvid productions in a manner that was similar to the strategic ignorance adopted by the representatives of the Japanese animation industry in response to the rapid growth of fan-subtitled tapes of Japanese animation in the 1990s.

Despite this muted form of tolerance and strategic ignorance from American license owners when it come to their work, fanvid parody groups from the 1980s to the 2000s would frequently playfully mock intimidating displays of copyright enforcement or openly encourage the continuing circulation of their work, thus seemingly resisting copyright law. For example, Corn Pone Flicks' 1989 comedy mashup *Captain Harlock vs. Han Solo* ends with a call for the viewers to "copy the film as much as possible" despite the appropriated copyrighted content within it.³⁴⁰ As for CDS Productions whose *Terminator 4: The Industry Strikes Back* already lampooned the excessive copyright enforcement rhetoric of J.A.I.L.E.D, their 1997 fanvid parody of the *Riding Bean* (1989) OVA entitled *Roadbusted* would even include, in its closing credits, an explicit reference to the Woodhead incident with Sral: "If your name is Robert J. Woodhead, then please come to the front of the room to get your free copy of this hack (While we run out the back)."³⁴¹ Similarly, NoN.D.E. Fan Films in *This is Otakudom* includes a parody of an FBI warning from the fictional organization FPI (Fan Parodies International), which instead encourages the free reproduction and distribution of "this unauthorized work of copyright infringement."³⁴² Recognizing the threat posed by the legal strategies that could be adopted by the American media industry to enforce their exclusive rights to distribute Japanese animated

³³⁹ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

³⁴⁰ "Captain Harlock vs Han Solo," *Vimeo*, Vimeo video, 7:43, posted by "Corn Pone Flicks," July 2nd, 2007, accessed May 1st, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/228576>

³⁴¹ "Roadbusted," streaming video, 42:40, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/road-busted/>

³⁴² "This is Otakudom," streaming video, 52:09, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/this-is-otakudom/>

content in the U.S. and elsewhere — animated texts that would be appropriated by fanvid parody creators and lay the foundation for their work — *This is Otakudom* would also jokingly ask content owners within its opening to refrain from suing their creators — a recurring joke within many early fanvid parodies. Likewise, the title screen for their later 2005 film *S.T.E.A.M.* contains a similar demand asking viewers to "copy and show freely" their work and "kill a bootlegger today!" as a means to "keep fan parodies free" along with another FPI warning demanding copyright owners watch fanvid parodies in a forgiving manner and, again, avoid pursuing legal action against their creators.³⁴³ The group's last parody *Fanboy Soze vs. The Reanimators of The Otakulypse* (2011) also features a satirical disclaimer asserting the exclusive right of the film's villainous media company Megatainment to 'hack up" anime and forbidding the creation of fan videos that do not contribute to its "monetary gain."³⁴⁴

Nevertheless, even though excessive forms of copyright enforcement were often criticized and playfully mocked within early fanvid parodies, their producers still showed their respect for the limitations placed on the use of pre-existing media properties within recent copyright legislation like the Copyright Act of 1976. This respect was reflected in their sincere attempt to adhere to two of the four factors determining whether a particular media use is a fair use — the "purpose or character of the use" and the "effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work."³⁴⁵ More specifically, as seen within the examples detailed in the previous paragraph, fanvid parody creators sought to situate their work as fair use by explicitly rejecting its commercial sale within the parodies themselves and within the wider community of Western anime fans. They also positioned their parody work as fair use by opting to freely circulate it while encouraging others to do the same within their parodies. In this sense, the creators of early fanvid parodies adopted the same non-profit ethics of the fansub creators analyzed by Leonard.³⁴⁶ By refusing to take money in exchange for their work and creating disclaimers within their parodies that stress its non-commercial character or encourage others to similarly keep circulating it for free, fanvid parody creators sought to ward off the threat of

³⁴³ "S.T.E.A.M.: The Movie," streaming video, 81:28, accessed August 2nd, 2017,

<http://animefanparodies.org/dub/steam-the-movie/>

³⁴⁴ "Fanboy Soze Vs. The Reanimators of the Otakulypse," streaming video, 43:33, accessed August 2nd, 2017,

<http://animefanparodies.org/dub/fanboy-soze-vs-the-reanimators-of-the-otakulypse/>

³⁴⁵ Act of October 19th, 1976, Pub. L. No. 94-553, 94th Cong., 2d Sess., 90 Stat. 2541. (1976). Retrieved at:

<https://www.copyright.gov/history/pl94-553.pdf>

³⁴⁶ Leonard, "Progress against the Law," 295.

copyright law, proprietary corporate policies, and the wide apparatus of regulatory strategies emerging to enforce them. For instance, with regard to the distribution of their fanvid parodies, Corn Pone Flicks states on their website that, due to their non-profit ethos, they refuse to take money in exchange for the fanvid productions they send to fans, even requiring that the latter send blank tapes accompanied by large self-addressed stamped envelopes or money to cover the return postage, so that they can copy a parody dub onto it and mail it back for free.³⁴⁷ Likewise, on their website, they would also encourage fans who do choose to copy their work to adhere to their non-profit ethics and not charge money for their parodies.³⁴⁸ Furthermore, Beaver from CDS Productions would also adopt a similar system involving self-addressed stamped envelopes for distributing free tapes of parodies and other anime content to fans.³⁴⁹ According to Beaver, donations of cash as well as laserdiscs and tapes of anime were accepted by fanvid creators, but only to replace damaged equipment and function as raw material for parodies, thus preserving the non-profit principles of the group.³⁵⁰ Reinforcing this non-profit stance, within the credits of the Redux version of Studio Sokodei's fanvid parody *Evangelion: ReDeath* (2000), the group's non-profit values would be foregrounded and encouraged through statements declaring that the parody "may not be sold or rented."³⁵¹ Aside from encouraging the non-profit sharing of their parodies within their own work, some of the above fanvid creators would also occasionally use their parodies to directly criticize profit-driven forms of copyright violation within fan communities. For instance, the subtitled parody *Terminator 3: Target Arctic Animation* (1995) by CDS Productions criticizes the fansubbing operation of Vancouver-based fan William Chow for the low quality of its fansubbed tapes and what was perceived to be its bootlegging of tapes in opposition to the SASE system of distribution.³⁵² Similarly, within NoN.D.E. Fan Films'

³⁴⁷ "How Hath They Broken the Rules? Let Us Count the Ways....," *Corn Pone Flicks*, accessed May 2nd, 2016, <http://www.cornponeflicks.org/rules.html>

³⁴⁸ Matt Murray, "So what the F.A.Q. is CORN PONE FLICKS?," *Corn Pone Flicks*, accessed May 2nd, 2015, <http://www.cornponeflicks.org/cpffaq.html>

³⁴⁹ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

³⁵⁰ Bobby Beaver, e-mail message to author, April 12th, 2016.

³⁵¹ "Evangelion ReDeath," streaming video, 34:01, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/evangelion-redeath/>

³⁵² "Terminator 3: Target Arctic Animation," streaming video, 18:09, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/terminator-3-target-arctic-animation/>; For more information on the otaku perception of William Chow, see Sean Leonard's original version of his piece on fan-subtitling and copyright law: Sean Leonard, "Progress Against the Law: Fan Distribution, Copyright, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation," revision 1.11, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, last modified September 12th, 2004, p. 51-52, <http://web.mit.edu/seantek/www/papers/progress-doublespaced.pdf>

second parody feature *S.T.E.A.M.*, footage from the animated series *Rurouni Kenshin* (1996-1998) and *Ranma ½* (1989-1992) among many others is appropriated to create a narrative in which a group of agents try to stop the plans of the group Team Evil as well as anime bootleggers, thus again positioning the fandub's creators against the enemies of a proprietary copyright system. Likewise, this continuous opposition within Western anime communities to the commercial sale of Japanese animation by Western fans would also often extend to fanvid parodies themselves. During one moment on the rec.arts.anime newsgroup in April 1998, it even manifested itself when a poster named Dosius was lambasted by anime fans for revealing his plan to sell a *Sailor Moon* fandub.³⁵³ Thus, although the creators of fanvid comedies frequently mock and criticize certain aspects of copyright enforcement within their work, their non-profit stance and condemnation of the illegal sale of copyrighted content and the fan works that appropriate it are specific tactics designed to situate their work within the limits of copyright law and its fair use exception and to function as a potential response to the more direct lawsuit-based enforcement strategies that are part of the larger regulatory apparatus emerging from the 1980s onwards following the failure of the Betamax case. In addition to its tactical purpose, this repeatedly expressed non-profit stance also serves to emphasize the more intrinsic, affective, and seemingly authentic motivations driving Western fans of Japanese animation to collaboratively produce and distribute fanvid parodies.

While contemporary creators of fanvid parodies including abridged series continue to respect the property rights of content owners as they produce their transformative work —still partly out of fear of the legal threat they might pose — American entertainment companies dedicated to the acquisition of Japanese animation rights like Funimation, in recent years, have begun to openly acknowledge the existence of such fanvid parodies due to their growing visibility within social media platforms and to move away from their previous stance of strategic ignorance. Moreover, they have continued to tolerate the passionate fans who appropriate their licensed anime properties to produce fanvid parodies and abridged series that could be deemed to engage in fair use but, to a greater extent than figures like Woodhead, they have also been more accepting of their distribution within communal spaces or online social media platforms like

³⁵³ Dosius (cI604), comment posted in "Sailor Moon Fansubs," rec.arts.anime Forum, comment posted on 4 April 1998, accessed March 28th, 2011, http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.anime.fandom/browse_thread/thread/8a2aec52bcc52727/34037e66c207e8ff?lnk=gst&q=fandubbing#34037e66c207e8ff

YouTube. For instance, on its website's FAQ page in 2014, Funimation foregrounds its policy to not:

... take legal action against creators/distributors of anime-based media that qualifies as a fair use of the underlying animation. Nor do we tend to remove such media intentionally, provided that the video is clearly marked in a way that would identify it as a fair use [in the title] such as a satire, parody, review or critique.³⁵⁴

In a more recent incarnation of its FAQ page, Funimation also warns fanvid creators to "bear in mind that video streaming services such as YouTube occasionally employ "video fingerprinting" technology to identify and remove videos containing ANY unauthorized footage, whether it's arguably a fair use or not" and suggests to them that, if they think their content involves fair use of the appropriated media and "was taken in error," they should file a counter-notification for alleged infringement at http://video.google.com/support/bin/request.py?contact_type=cyc and follow the instructions, or submit a ticket with a member of our Support Team at Funimation.com/support.³⁵⁵ In other cases, some of these more recent companies would even publicly support the production of fanvid parodies. For instance, on the official YouTube channel of the former animation licensing company 4kids Entertainment, a representative declared its support on March 12th, 2009 for Martin Billany's *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series* on the grounds that "we'll take anyone's support," a reaction that surprised Billany given his series' open criticism of 4kids' localization practices.³⁵⁶ As fanvid parodies moved beyond the less immediately visible material spaces of Western anime fandom — anime clubs, conventions, etc. — into the more visible realm of social media platforms in the second half of the twenty first century's first decade, American licensees of Japanese animation series and films began to more publicly tolerate the affective production of transformative fan content resulting from the immaterial labour of Western anime fans and the widespread circulation of this paratextual media. This seemingly more inclusive and less prohibitionist response from these companies was partly due to the potential difficulty and cost of successfully prosecuting fan uses of their licensed media that could be deemed fair use, but also because the wider circulation of this amateur media could potentially draw more attention towards their media properties and increase

³⁵⁴ "Funimation.com FAQ," *Funimation*, accessed June 25th, 2014, http://www.funimation.com/forum/faq.php?faq=faq_fun_general#faq_faq_fun_general_4 [inactive]

³⁵⁵ "Funimation FAQ," *Funimation.com*, accessed August 15th, 2017, <https://www.funimation.com/contact-us/>

³⁵⁶ Martin Billany, "The Plot Thickens," *Live Journal*, last modified on March 18, 2009, accessed March 26th 2011, <http://littlekuriboh.livejournal.com/2009/03/18/> [site discontinued]

their sales. This less restrictive response, on one level, is part of the larger apparatus of more inclusive and flexible strategies of control that are emerging alongside the twenty first century's user-driven online media ecosystem composed of social media platforms like YouTube. Nevertheless, as will be illustrated in the rest of this chapter, despite the idealistic Web 2.0 rhetoric of global user empowerment surrounding this new online environment, this new apparatus of strategies and the increasingly transnational corporate entities that enact or support them still impose constraints and limitations on particular kinds of user-generated production as well as their circulation online while co-existing with regulatory apparatuses marked by the more direct forms of control embodied by corporate lawsuits. For example, due to fansubbing's growing visibility online and elsewhere in the early 2000s, on July 7th, 2004, a lawsuit was filed against the creators of fan-subtitled tapes who were selling bootleg DVDs by Bandai Entertainment — a now defunct American-based subsidiary of Bandai America Incorporated, a distribution and licensing enterprise of the Japanese toy company Bandai Co. Ltd.³⁵⁷ More recently, this stance was even briefly adopted in January 2011 by Funimation when they filed a lawsuit against 1337 individuals who allegedly downloaded and distributed the 481st episode of the pirate-based series *One Piece* (1999-present) until they dropped it later on.³⁵⁸ A similar lawsuit in early 2012 would then be directed by the original copyright owner of the series, Toei Animation, towards 869 BitTorrent Users.³⁵⁹

Unfortunately, the increasing number of fanvid parodies and abridged series hosted on YouTube would eventually be caught in the middle of American and Japanese media corporations' mission to stop the online spread of copyright-infringing fan-subtitled episodes of Japanese animation series while, in the case of the former U.S. companies, supportively accepting and tolerating the more transformative incarnations of fan videos that are less harmful to their financial interests and often beneficial to them. Despite the frequent portrayal of Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube as radically inclusive spaces where amateur creators can produce and

³⁵⁷ Levi, "The Americanization of Anime and Manga," 47.

³⁵⁸ "Funimation Sues 1,337 BitTorrent Users Over One Piece," *Anime News Network*, last modified on January 25th, 2011, accessed on June 25th, 2014, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-01-25/funimation-sues-1337-bittorrent-users-over-one-piece>; "Funimation Dismisses its One Piece BitTorrent Lawsuit," *Anime News Network*, last modified on March 24th, 2011, accessed June 25th, 2014, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-03-24/funimation-dismisses-its-one-piece-bittorrent-lawsuit>

³⁵⁹ "Toei Animation Sues 869 BitTorrent Users over One Piece," *Anime News Network*, last modified on February 7th, 2012, accessed on June 25th, 2014, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2012-02-07/toei-animation-sues-869-bittorrent-users-over-one-piece>

freely distribute their own media unimpeded, the participatory creative agency of their users is always limited to a degree due to its situation within an online ecosystem that is shaped by an emerging apparatus of more inclusive strategies seeking to flexibly control and channel it for profit — an apparatus whose array of discursive and non-discursive regulatory strategies result from the intersection of the interests of various global corporations and platform owners with the limits of U.S. copyright law from the late 1990s onwards. The most relevant constraints imposed on creative agency of YouTube users like the producers of fanvid parody series — otherwise known as abridged series — ironically stem from the current attempts of Google to strike a balance between the protections afforded to content owners and citizens within U.S. copyright law and its desire to include a larger amount of user-generated content and professional media on its platform, so as to monetize the resulting audience and profit from their immaterial products. Despite Google's intent to be inclusive and to manage the activity of YouTube in a more flexible and neutral manner through a variety of platform strategies, its need to simultaneously adhere to the regulatory rules of contemporary copyright law compels it to limit certain types of user-driven creative works, especially if they involve the appropriation of existing media properties like abridged series.

Abridged Series, Their Core Traits, and the Constituent Force of Fan Affect

It was in this new context that Billany — an individual who came to become a fan of the multiple media incarnations of the *Yu-Gi-Oh* television series and, subsequently, a creator of fan fiction and AMVs — would create a short, fanvid parody of the series' first episode localized by 4Kids Entertainment with ripped footage from an official DVD, thus beginning what he would call the *Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Abridged Series*. As part of a media mix that already inspired, according to Mizuko Ito, “certain forms of otaku-like engagement in a participatory media culture,” the transmedia *Yu-Gi-Oh* franchise composed of card-games, manga, video games, and various television series seemingly invited the kind of participatory transformations imposed on it by Billany.³⁶⁰ In the process of creating the parody-based abridged series that would follow the above episode's success and voicing the majority of its characters, he would popularize the practice of fanvid parody on social media platforms like YouTube and, due to his growing

³⁶⁰ Mizuko Ito, “Japanese Media Mix and Amateur Cultural Exchange,” in *Digital Generations: Children, Young People, and New Media* eds. David Buckingham and Rebekah Willett (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 2006), 56.

popularity as a YouTube creator, seemingly embody the individualistic and user-centric narrative of creative empowerment perpetuated within discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and YouTube itself. In addition, due to the networked communication and connection with other users afforded by YouTube's platform and other online services, the production of later seasons of Billany's *Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Abridged Series* would also come to involve the wider participation and collaboration of other geographically dispersed fans of Japanese animation who were members of other fanvid parody groups like TeamFourStar and who worked as amateur voice actors within their own contemporaneous abridged series like *Dragon Ball Z Abridged*. Because of the online collaborations with other Japanese animation fans that often resulted from the usually group-based production of abridged series, their production retained the collaborative character of earlier fanvid parody groups while no longer being as constrained by the geographical location of each networked member. Consequently, aside from the initially individualistic character of Billany's early work and its support of a more user-centric empowerment narrative, the frequently collaborative dimension of abridged series also appeared to lend further credence to Web 2.0 discourse's complementary vision of network-based collaborative empowerment. However, while potentially driven by a participatory and affective desire to independently engage with a cherished media property and create their own work similar to the creators of past fanvid parodies, the format of abridged series like Billany's, as already partially demonstrated earlier, is significantly influenced by the unique architecture and features of YouTube at the time of its emergence, but by the remediated televisual traits of the platform and the television-based media properties these series tended to appropriate. For instance, as a contemporary social media incarnation of fanvid parody, abridged series complement what Richard Grusin perceives as YouTube's own active remediation of televisual traits within its platform architecture.³⁶¹ YouTube's placement of ads within some of its videos, its use of televisual terminology like channels or broadcast as within its slogan, and its encouragement of serial programming and regular viewership through its playlist and subscription features all echoed various aspects of the television medium and seemed designed to render some of the platform's core elements more immediately familiar and accessible to new users. As stated earlier, the playlist features of YouTube would particularly influence the

³⁶¹ Richard Grusin, "Youtube at the End of New Media," in *The YouTube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 61.

episodic televisual form of abridged series like *Yu-Gi-Oh! the Abridged Series*. Moreover, beyond its presence on a user 'channel,' Billany himself would also specifically adopt the terminology of television when he divides the *Yu-Gi-Oh! the Abridged Series* into “seasons,” the first two of which are composed of 22 and 24 episodes, respectively. Reinforcing the series' status as a web show emulating the episodic format of television programming, *Yu-Gi-Oh! the Abridged Series'* individual episodes are grouped within Billany's initial channel LittleKuriboh in order using the platform's playlist feature and often organized according to the "seasons" of which they are a part. Once accessed as a playlist by users, the series' episodes can be viewed sequentially in manner that approximates the flow of television. Moreover, beginning with the fifth episode, the series introduces an intro sequence accompanied by the song — “Kawaita Sakebi” by *Field of View* — which was directly borrowed from the original Japanese animation series and thus mimics the opening credits of most modern television shows, but especially those of televised anime series. Echoing the medium of television with its ad-based attention economy and seeking to cultivate a media environment that is already familiar to potential users through the adoption of its terminology and the encouragement of serial programming, YouTube, contrary to rhetoric espousing the independence and difference of Web 2.0 platforms from mass media forms like television, reveals its lingering connections to the latter. More importantly, it is this residual influence of television that would shape some of the architectural features of YouTube like its playlists compelling amateur creators of abridged series like Billany to emulate the serial character of television programming — an effect that is reinforced by these creators' pre-existing affective relationship with the television anime shows they appropriate for parodic purposes within abridged series and, by extension, the television format.

Furthermore, even through fanvid parody creators like Billany and Team Four Star often premiere new material from their abridged series at North American anime conventions as a reward for attending fans and a way to enjoy the passionate and communal form of reception and connection that such locations and their knowledgeable communities of anime fans offer, Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube have significantly influenced the practice of fanvid parody and abridged series through other means than those listed in the previous paragraph, ultimately becoming the primary spaces for their circulation. Specifically, they allow their creators to: distribute their episodic videos to a wider audience and more easily connect with the above fan communities; cultivate and reinforce significant affective relationships with its members or

among them for the fanvid work itself and Japanese animation; and, lastly, to communicate and collaborate more easily across national and regional boundaries with fanvid creators. These platforms have also enabled fanvid parody creators to engage in open discussions about this fan media and Japanese animation itself and share what Jenkins has termed the collective intelligence of fans.³⁶² For instance, besides sharing their knowledge of existing animation properties by mocking them and their features within their fanvid parody work, certain creators of abridged series like Ben Creighton, the creator of the *Berserk the Abridged Series* (2007) otherwise known by his YouTube channel name hbi2k, and Scott Frerichs, the director of Team Four Star's *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* (2008-present) known as KaiserNeko, have also uploaded informative video commentaries on YouTube that extensively detailed the labour and techniques which go into creating episodes for their respective series.³⁶³ The intricate fan knowledge shared by the creators of abridged series and the affective and communicative relationships with their audience members cultivated by their labour on YouTube and elsewhere, in a sense, contribute to the form of "common" that, as detailed in the introduction's discussion of Hardt and Negri, results from the immaterial labour increasingly channeled within contemporary capitalism and partially embodied by the practice of fanvid parody itself.

Despite the influence of social media platforms like YouTube and their particular affordances on the production and distribution of abridged series and other paratextual content along with the knowledge and affective relationships that their creators' labour cultivates and spreads, the latter are also the products of the pre-existing transformative form of otaku engagement already embodied and undertaken by the practitioners of fanvid parody from the 1980s onwards with the often limited technological resources they possessed. As detailed by media theorists Thomas Lamarre and Hiroki Azuma, this form of otaku engagement with copyrighted media recognizes no form of hierarchy among the components of the animated image and frequently intervenes directly within them.³⁶⁴ In opposition to Azuma who periodizes it as emerging in the 1990s, Lamarre correctly asserts that this engaged mode of otaku perception

³⁶² Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 4.

³⁶³ Conversely, since the 1990s, other past fanvid parody groups like Sherbert Productions, Corn Pone Flicks, Seishun Shitemasu, and Studio Sokodei have used more text-based forms on websites to communicate information about the production history and development of a parody project while others like NoN.D.E. Fan Films have included some of this type of information on DVDs of their parody films.

³⁶⁴ Thomas LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 145; Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 39-52, 53-54.

emerged following the advent of accessible VHS tapes within otaku communities and thus coincided with the growing popularization of VHS-bound fanvid parodies from the 1980s to the early 2000s within Western anime fandom.³⁶⁵ As already demonstrated previously in this chapter, early fanvid parody groups like CDS Productions and Studio Sokodei already engaged in this transformative type of otaku engagement and, in their diverse work, actively manipulated the image layers and elements of various animated texts from Japan in an overtly non-hierarchical manner. Ironically, this type of visual compositing is strikingly similar to LaMarre's own characterization of the compositing techniques adopted within limited Japanese animation.³⁶⁶ More interestingly, when deployed in a fanvid parody, it produced multilayered images that cultivated, within otaku observers, a non-hierarchical form of otaku perception similar to the mode of engagement which, according to Lamarre, is inspired by their close contact with the limited animation of Japanese anime series, particularly as experienced via VHS tapes. The existence of this unique mode of otaku engagement also supports the recent thoughts of Ian Condry on the collaborative creativity found within and outside the Japanese animation industry because the creators of fanvid parodies, especially abridged series, similarly appropriate the visual data of characters and worlds from televised anime series and engage with them as generative platforms for collaborative creativity — creativity that ultimately increases the value of the chosen content itself.³⁶⁷ In fact, television anime series — which were often the media objects appropriated by early fanvid parody groups — were often an ideal platform for this creative and often collaborative type of otaku engagement because, due to the limited animation and relatively static image layers which often defined such series, the playful form of compositing often found within fanvid parodies were rendered a little easier to execute. Although this mode of fan engagement with Japanese animation along with the non-hierarchical manipulation and intertextual appropriation of co-existing visual elements from disparate animated texts that tends to stem from it has long existed within Western anime fandom and amidst the creators of fanvid parodies, it has been accentuated in the 2000s by the increasing access of fans to non-linear editing software tools, but also by their increased exposure to the wider range of fan-made and professional Japanese animation and media being officially and

³⁶⁵ LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 145.

³⁶⁶ LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, 36.

³⁶⁷ Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 57-58, 125, 213-214.

unofficially circulated online and offline via the contemporaneous screens, windows, and channels of twenty first century social media platforms and online streaming services like YouTube. Specifically, the way that connected individuals and groups interact with the visual database of co-existing media content currently found on YouTube may have further influenced the existing tendency of Western anime fans and fanvid parody creators to decode their favourite animated series or films from Japan into non-hierarchical visual elements and creatively manipulate them to produce original transformative works like abridged series.

Supported by the arrival of more sophisticated incarnations of image and video editing software and potentially influenced by the non-hierarchical form of contemporary social media platforms, this form of otaku engagement — especially the manipulation of image layers and video footage from Japanese animation — would persist and even increase within the parody episodes of abridged series that appropriated the content of televised anime series from Japan. One example of the manipulation of the audiovisual elements of such animated television series, which is pervasive within abridged series, involves the synchronization of fandubbed dialogue with the lip flaps of a character within the appropriated footage. For instance, Frerichs of Team Four Star displays this form of fan engagement when he uses Adobe Premiere CS5 for his *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* parody series — which appropriates footage from the Japanese animated series *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-1996) — in order to edit and repeat three frames of lip movement involving a relatively static animated character: fully open, half-closed, and closed lips. While occasionally adjusting the visual placement of lip flaps within a frame to follow a character's movement in a scene, Frerichs mostly edits these three frames of mouth movement within the more dominant static sequences of televised anime series, so that they match the appropriate volume of each syllable uttered by the fan performing the newly written comedic dialogue of a parody episode.³⁶⁸ Similarly, Frerichs also engages in a lot of image-based compositing within each *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* episode in order to transplant character designs, objects, and animated footage from the original show or other anime series into new

³⁶⁸ “TFS Behind the Scenes: Advanced Lip Sync Tutorial,” *YouTube* video, 5:42, posted by “LazyOatmeal,” May 9th, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_j1DjVzxsg&t=16s; “TFS Behind the Scenes: Intro to Lip Synchron Tutorial,” *YouTube* video, 5:22, posted by “LazyOatmeal,” May 9th, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awSeDy5B_js&t=2s

contexts with similarly altered, color-corrected, or entirely original background layers.³⁶⁹ This form of media engagement can even be found within Billany's *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series* when he manipulates backgrounds and character designs from a wide variety of animated content to cultivate a form of 'insider' intertextuality understood by anime fans as well as to better suit his reconstructed narratives. For instance, in the 50th episode of *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series*, he appropriates footage from the third season episode "Courtroom Chaos" of the original series in which protagonist Yugi's sidekick Joey Wheeler is engaged in card battle against the villain Johnson.³⁷⁰ Aside from overlaying the episode's footage with an original and skillfully lip-synched comedic dub, the episode's new narrative also relies on the manipulation of various characters taken from the franchise and other abridged series. For instance, by using a static courtroom background with a witness stand, Billany digitally composites the static images of several figures from the series' card game matches and a character from *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* onto the stand, so he can create a hearing against Joey for copyright infringement. In this new scene, Johnson is now framed as an inflexible judge responsible for recent copyright claims against abridged series on YouTube. The scene ends with a closing statement by Joey defending fan creativity and the support for the *Yu-Gi-Oh* franchise it inspires while vowing to never stop creatively expressing their affection for the series and sharing it with others. While reflecting the affect driving abridged series creators to transformatively manipulate the footage and visual elements of the anime series they cherish, the complicated amount of image-based compositing on display in the above example contributes to the construction of a meta-commentary on the perseverance of the affective passion of fanvid parody creators when confronted with the excesses of American copyright law. More specifically, this constructed commentary highlights how the affect and emotional passion of these creators for the animated Japanese texts they appropriate — which motivates their labour and is often also an immaterial product contagiously transmitted to others — will continue to compel them to create and distribute their transformative fanvid content for other like-minded fans.

³⁶⁹ "Episode Breakdown: Ep 41," *Team Four Star* video, 5:41, posted by "Lanipator," April 26th, 2014, <http://teamfourstar.com/episode-breakdown-ep-41/>; "Episode Breakdown: Ep 42," *Team Four Star* video, 4:01, posted by "Lanipator," May 24th, 2014, <http://teamfourstar.com/episode-breakdown-ep-42/>

³⁷⁰ "YGOTAS Episode 50 - Joey Wheeler Ace Attorney," YouTube video, 9:13, posted by "LittleKuriboh," October 31st, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmOwNfzhkyQ>

Echoing the constituent power present within Hardt and Negri's conception of immaterial and affective labour and of the commonly shared immaterial social products it cultivates, the labour and dynamic force propelling the continued circulation of the work of fanvid parody creators on YouTube and the transmission of their affective passion for the animated content they appropriate — as suggested by Billany's parody episode — echoes Ian Condry's characterization of the creative "dark energy" or "social forces" that "enlivens the connections between content and desire" and similarly drives the movement of otaku media.³⁷¹ Elsewhere, drawing on Hardt and Negri's view of the constituent power of labour, Lamarre would similarly conceptualize this type of otaku movement as a mobile "force of desire" that can constitute original cultural experiences.³⁷² While the affective dimension of this force of desire is not explicitly stated, it complements Hardt and Negri's understanding of immaterial labour's capacity to produce affect and its constituent power to act, create, and resist regulatory forces.³⁷³ In the case of Billany's abridged series, the affect-driven labour that goes into the production and circulation of fan content with the partial intent of spreading an affective and emotional appreciation for the *Yu-Gi-Oh* franchise and anime in general has resulted, as will be detailed later, in the creation of original cultural objects and platforms outside of YouTube like merchandise and fan sites. It has also contributed to the continued movement of *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series* and its parodic episodes to alternative YouTube channels, other social media platforms like the now defunct Blip TV, and Team Four Star's website along with mobile devices and computer hard-drives due to the past and present availability of episodes in numerous languages on a wide range of online services including iTunes and file-sharing sites.

Contemporary Fanvid Parodies and the New Threat of Copyright Law

However, despite the transformative character and expansive reach of the fanvid parodies and abridged series found on social media platforms like YouTube, copyright law would eventually come into conflict with the above affect-driven and -producing labour once this content gained a more public presence within them. Lev Manovich has even remarked upon how, on Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, the formerly ephemeral and relatively invisible tactics of

³⁷¹ Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*, 163.

³⁷² Thomas Lamarre, "Otaku Movement," in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, eds. Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 359.

³⁷³ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 292-293, 358-59, 406-407, 410; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 108, 351.

early fanvid creators like AMV producers have become more “permanent, mappable, and viewable”; in other words, they have become more visible to the wider public, but also to the media corporations who own the copyrighted content appropriated within these videos as well as to partially automated content identification systems like YouTube's Content ID.³⁷⁴ Undercutting the discourse of radical creative empowerment and freedom for amateur users and communities surrounding Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, the creators of abridged series — situated as they are within Western anime fandom and its communities — are significantly constrained by the platform decisions and strategies adopted by YouTube in order to appease the proprietary interests of individual copyright owners and media corporations while satisfying the competing desire of the platform's users for a more communal environment in which they are afforded greater creative and social freedom. In this sense, the fragile ecosystem of YouTube — with its conflict between the protection of individualistic creative rights for media corporations and users and the desire of some of its participants to achieve the communal ideal promised by Web 2.0 discourse — possesses some of the same contradictions that David Harvey finds within neoliberal capitalism. Specifically, it parallels what he regards as the contradiction between the possessive individualism that neoliberalism cultivates and "a desire for a meaningful collective life," a tension that is often revolved through the exertion of control and limits in order to maintain an economy that privileges individual enterprise.³⁷⁵ In order to resolve the tension between these competing desires, YouTube was compelled to indirectly regulate the transformative forms of user creativity that appropriate copyrighted media properties through a variety of flexible control strategies increasingly found within the user-driven online media ecosystem of the twenty first century and the emerging apparatus supporting its neoliberal economy. This particular situation resulted from the reformulation of copyright law within the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of 1998 in response to the digital turn and the protections seemingly afforded to the creators of technology as a result of the Betamax case. According to Jenkins, this change brought forward by the DMCA solidified “the consolidation of power” within copyright law in favour of mass media owners.³⁷⁶ William Patry has even argued that, in order to justify the more excessive elements of the DMCA such as its requirement that

³⁷⁴ Lev Manovich, “The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 324, <https://doi.org/10.1086/596645>.

³⁷⁵ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 69.

³⁷⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 137.

online intermediaries like YouTube adopt a flawed notice and takedown system — a system that would enable media corporations to more easily find and suppress critical and fair uses of their content without really determining whether infringement has actually occurred — a moral panic was constructed to frame digital distribution as an existential threat to media creators.³⁷⁷

Elsewhere, Gillespie has similarly traced how the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and representatives like Jack Valenti would similarly frame online networks as havens for copyright infringement in order to culturally legitimate certain legal actions in support of media corporations.³⁷⁸ As indicated above, this type of cultural discourse would ultimately contribute to the DMCA's requirement of a notice and takedown procedure in order for online platforms like YouTube to be considered a Safe Harbor and be exempt from liability over hosting infringing user-generated content. According to Julie Cohen, this control strategy was designed by media industries to compel a distributed form of copyright enforcement over a digital network.³⁷⁹ She further highlights how copyright owners would come to abuse this notice and takedown requirement by "using automated detection tools to comb the network for unprotected content and generate large numbers of takedown notices."³⁸⁰ And, while using the DMCA's notice and takedown system as a foundation, these same copyright owners have exerted considerable pressure on online service providers like YouTube to "implement automated filtering protocols for 'user-generated content'" with the intent that the adoption of such regulatory strategies becomes normalized within online networks.³⁸¹ For example, deemed to be inadequately fulfilling the requirements necessary for the DMCA's Safe Harbour exemption, YouTube came under the threat of a massive lawsuit over copyright infringement by Viacom in March 2007 as detailed by Paul MacDonald.³⁸²

In order to assuage the copyright-related fears of its media content partners, YouTube began to deploy several discursive strategies of control intended to influence and flexibly guide its independent users into inhabiting a creative form of subjectivity that produces original content

³⁷⁷ William Patry, *Moral Panics and Copyright Wars*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167-170.

³⁷⁸ Tarleton Gillespie, *Wired Shut: Copyright and the Shape of Digital Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007), 105-135.

³⁷⁹ Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*, 162.

³⁸⁰ Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*, 162.

³⁸¹ Cohen, *Configuring the Networked Self: Law, Code, and the Play of Everyday Practice*, 163.

³⁸² Paul McDonald, "Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy: Advertising versus Content versus Copyright," *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009) 400-401.

that did not appropriate copyrighted material and instructed them to autonomously avoid such uses within their videos. This emerging discourse against copyright infringement often manifested itself on YouTube's website over the years since its purchase by Google through webpages offering "Copyright Tips," its own published copyright infringement policy, Help and Copyright sections with information about copyright and the platform's copyright-related features, its community guidelines or code of conduct, and, lastly, announcements about and descriptions of its content filtering and copyright enforcement systems.³⁸³ If users uploaded videos that were flagged by YouTube for containing copyrighted content through its systems, this discursive rejection of copyright infringement would also re-emerge when the platform then forced the supposed offenders to take part in Copyright School starting in 2011 — a new feature which compelled them to watch and complete a short instructional video and quiz intended to inform them about the differences between copyright infringing and non-infringing types of uploaded media before re-granting them the privilege to upload new content.³⁸⁴ Despite this platform discourse's frequent downplaying of copyright law's many limitations such as the fair use exception in its attempt to dissuade users from uploading content that appropriates elements from existing media properties, YouTube continued to frame itself as a radically empowering platform for all types of user-generated creative activity. For instance, within various pages of its website including its earlier Copyright information sections, it would often allow for the uploading of content engaging in fair use appropriation and occasionally inform its users on the limits of fair use.³⁸⁵ Further reflecting its persistent desire to include user-generated content,

³⁸³ For examples of this type of discourse, see "Copyright Tips," *YouTube*, October 11th, 2007, Internet Archive screengrab, http://web.archive.org/web/20071011082852/http://www.youtube.com:80/t/howto_copyright; "What is Your Policy on Copyright Infringement?," *Google*, December 6th, 2007, Internet Archive screengrab, <http://web.archive.org/web/20071206000545/http://www.google.com:80/support/youtube/bin/answer.py?answer=55772&topic=10554>; "What is Copyright?," *YouTube*, December 26th, 2011, Internet Archive grab, https://web.archive.org/web/20111226173946/http://www.youtube.com/t/copyright_what_is; "Copyright on YouTube," *YouTube*, accessed August 21st, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/yt/about/copyright/#support-and-troubleshooting>; "YouTube Community Guidelines," *YouTube*, December 10th, 2006, Internet Archive screengrab, http://web.archive.org/web/20061210105313/http://www.youtube.com/t/community_guidelines; Steve Chen, "The State of Our Video ID Tools," *Google Blog*, June 14th, 2007, <https://googleblog.blogspot.ca/2007/06/state-of-our-video-id-tools.html>; Dave King, "Latest Content ID tool for YouTube," *Google Blog*, October 15th, 2007, <https://googleblog.blogspot.ca/2007/10/latest-content-id-tool-for-youtube.html>; "Audio ID and Video ID," *YouTube*, January 22nd, 2010, Internet Archive screengrab, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100122003419/http://www.youtube.com/t/contentid>

³⁸⁴ Justin Green, "YouTube Copyright Education (remixed)," *YouTube's Official Blog*, April 14th, 2011, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2011/04/youtube-copyright-education-remixed.html>; "Copyright School," *YouTube*, accessed August 16th, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/copyright_school

³⁸⁵ "Copyright Tips," *YouTube*, December 10th, 2006, Internet Archive screengrab, http://web.archive.org/web/20061210101148/http://youtube.com:80/t/howto_copyright; "Using Copyrighted

which appropriates copyrighted material, are the various counter-notification and dispute options that the platform has long offered to users who have been accused of copyright infringement, whether through a Content ID claim on their work or a copyright strike against their videos. Moreover, as an indirect means to decrease the abuse of its copyright enforcement systems and policies and prevent them from obstructing the continued expansion of user participation it seeks, Google has also begun to instruct copyright owners against submitting fraudulent copyright takedown notices and claims against user-generated content on YouTube, stating that "Misuse of this process may result in the suspension of your account or other legal consequences."³⁸⁶ The platform's flexible discursive approach to encouraging its users to contribute additional content while avoiding explicit forms of copyright infringement, however, functions as a compromise intended to resolve the central tension between YouTube's consistent desire to accumulate more monetizable user content including media engaging in fair use and its competing need to satisfy the proprietary interests of media corporations like Viacom and the current requirements of U.S. copyright law as articulated within the DMCA. The dynamic interplay of this desire to encourage the creative agency of online users, include its media content, and channel its products on Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube channel with the need to exclude particular manifestations of this creative autonomy that could threaten its profit potential and undermine the proprietary logic that still drives the platform is reflective of the more flexible apparatus of control strategies currently supporting the dominant communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism that is now driving the user-driven online media ecosystems and economies of the twenty first century.

Part of this same compromise between the inclusion of user content and the exclusion of infringing material, but constructed as a supplementary means to satisfy the DMCA's Safe Harbour exemption at a lower cost than direct content management by human employees was YouTube's 2007 introduction of "an automated video-recognition system intended to search the site to identify infringing material before takedown notices are received," a system which eventually came to be known as Content ID.³⁸⁷ While addressing the restrictive effect of digital

Material in Your Video," *YouTube*, December 26th, 2011, Internet Archive screengrab, https://web.archive.org/web/20111226173922/http://www.youtube.com/t/copyright_permissions, "What is Fair Use," *YouTube*, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/intl/en-GB/yt/about/copyright/fair-use/>;

³⁸⁶ "Submit a Copyright Takedown Notice," *Google*, accessed July 15th, 2017, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2807622?hl=en>

³⁸⁷ McDonald, "Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy," 399.

rights management systems on the protection of the rights accorded by copyright law, Lawrence Lessig would write that:

As privatized law, trusted systems regulate in the same domain where copyright law regulates, but, unlike copyright law, they do not guarantee the same public use protection. Trusted systems give the producer maximum control - admittedly at a cheaper cost, thus permitting many more authors to publish. But they give authors more control (either to charge or limit use) in an area where the law gave less than perfect control. Code displaces the balance in copyright law and doctrines such as fair use.³⁸⁸

Similarly, the pressure to implement automated content filtering systems like YouTube's Content ID on social media platforms had a similar effect in that their highly automated character afforded a more instantaneous form of control over copyright enforcement to media corporations who could then abuse the content filtering and takedown process enabled by this system, without the need for any human actor to determine whether a use of media is 'fair' or not. On another level though, Content ID's heavily automated nature appears to complement YouTube's self-cultivated image as inclusive platform for the creative empowerment of other users in that it seemingly promises a more neutral, indirect, and impartial form of content regulation wherein the managers of the platform have less direct control over this system of exclusion. Given that media companies who are copyright rich are the primary actors allowed to submit their content to the database of files which Content ID uses to scan YouTube for matches and to interact with this system, Content ID thus inherently accords media companies a disproportionate amount of power and control over how it enforces their copyright ownership if matches are indeed found. By potentially obstructing the distribution of user-generated content that could be said to involve the fair use of existing media, such as abridged series, and significantly according more control to media corporations over its heavily automated functions, Content ID undercuts YouTube's self-presentation as a neutral foundation that can radically empower and include amateur creators by liberating them from the gatekeeping and restrictions typically imposed by mass media industries within the field of media distribution.

Instead of factoring in the potential for an appropriation of a media text to be fair use, Content ID when initially designed merely identified infringing content and offered three options to YouTube's media partners: "taking down the videos, tracking them, or receiving revenues for

³⁸⁸ Lawrence Lessig, "The Promise for Intellectual Property in Cyberspace," in *New Media Theory Reader*, edited by Robert Hassan and Julian Thomas, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 140.

advertising placed in them.”³⁸⁹ Partly stemming from Google's persistent interest in attracting advertisers to buy a variety of ad units on the platform and corporate media partners to upload more of their professional content to it, strategies like Content ID intended to appease the proprietary interests of these same companies ultimately serve to protect the continuing existence of the platform itself and the monetization of its amateur and professional content from the threat of a lawsuit. Moreover, the Content ID system itself also further enables Google's desire to keep accumulating revenue on the YouTube platform by offering copyright owners the option to monetize infringing user content. By seeking to monetize the platform's increasingly mappable video content, whether it contains copyrighted material or not, Mark Andrejevic has argued that Google has slowly transformed YouTube “from a community of video sharing into a revenue machine.”³⁹⁰ Moreover, he concludes that, through such monetization strategies, YouTube exploits the free immaterial labour of its users and the data it produces, mostly to the benefit of Google and its media partners.³⁹¹ Certain media companies from the United States and Japan have even sought to exploit YouTube's Content ID system to commercialize fanvid content while they simultaneously benefit from the indirect promotion of their properties they create and the valuable viewership data they provide. For example, in 2008, the Japanese multi-media publisher Kadokawa sought to use Content ID in order to share a portion of the ad revenue produced from select fanvid creators using their animated content like *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (2006) on YouTube.³⁹² Similarly, according to one of its copyright specialists, Evan Fournoy, in 2009, Funimation — an American entertainment company that licenses the North American distribution rights for Japanese animation — had made an effort to use Content ID in order to monetize fan content using its licensed content on the behalf of the company, regardless of whether or not the use is fair.³⁹³ Some Japanese and American media corporations are thus increasingly interested in channeling the common products resulting from the labour of the creators of fanvid productions like abridged series — particularly the affectively charged

³⁸⁹ Mark Andrejevic, “Exploiting Youtube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour,” *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 410.

³⁹⁰ Andrejevic, “Exploiting Youtube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour,” 410.

³⁹¹ Andrejevic, “Exploiting Youtube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour,” 416-420.

³⁹² Kenji Hall, “Japanese Anime Studio Embraces YouTube Pirates,” *Business Week*, last modified August 5th, 2008, accessed 10 July, 2011, http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/aug2008/gb2008085_543162.htm

³⁹³ Evan Fournoy, “Chicks on Anime: Copyright Enforcement,” Interview with B. Dong and S. Pocock, *Anime News Network*, last modified May 5th 2009, accessed October 11th, 2011, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/chicks-on-anime/2009-05-05>

audience relationships they have cultivated and the potential ad revenue that can result from them. This strategy to include and monetize fanvid productions with ads, while rare, complements the overall attempt of American distribution companies like Funimation, which license Japanese animated content, to minimize its illegal circulation on file-sharing sites and to better profit from the large audience of anime fans that has been cultivated online over the years — often by the creators of fan content themselves — by bringing official episodes of anime series more directly to them on advertising and subscription-supported platforms like YouTube or streaming and simulcasting services that are owned by them or by third parties like Crunchyroll. Such platforms also often seek to cultivate and embrace similar fan communities through the inclusion of features like web forums, groups, and comment sections as well as the integration of their content with a variety of social media platforms like Twitter.

In contrast to these attempts by predominantly American distribution companies like Funimation to accommodate and further tolerate the productivity of online fanvid creators, Japanese owners of animated content like Nihon Ad Systems, Sunrise, Toei Animation, and Shogakukan-Shueisha Productions would allow YouTube's Content ID system to take down any video identified as using their content including many episodes of abridged series and even past fanvid parodies being uploaded onto the platform — a reductive approach to eliminating the illegal online distribution of their official animated content. The disinterest from animation production companies from Japan in whether the appropriation of copyrighted content undertaken by Western fans is fair use or not is informed by the tendency of the Japanese court system to deny the existence of a broad fair use defence and to privilege the moral rights of copyright owners over any user who produces parodies, thus framing the latter always in terms of unlawful infringement.³⁹⁴ Adopting this mindset, many Japanese corporations involved with the animation industry have used YouTube's Content ID system in order to find and immediately take down user videos by fans that appropriate their content for any reason, whether it is to upload it in its entirety or to create a transformative fanvid parody episode. Consequently, according to Pinesalad Productions, after uploading their early parodies of *Dirty Pair* in March 2010 on YouTube, copyright claims by Japanese animation studio Sunrise were automatically

³⁹⁴ Susan Wilson and Cameron Hutchison, "A Comparative Study of 'Fair Use' In Japanese, Canadian and US Copyright Law," *Hosei Rison*, Volume 41. No. 3-4 (March 2009): 245, 251-252, 272.

sent to the parody group's channel.³⁹⁵ While not the product of a copyright claim by a Japanese company, One video fragment of Pinesalad Productions' 1980s *Robotech* fanvid parody *How Drugs won the War*, which was also uploaded on YouTube, was also confronted with a music-related copyright claim and muted, leading the group to state in the video's description that "you will no longer be able to view this video with audio thanks to oppressive policies at YouTube that screw the little guy doing parody."³⁹⁶ Experiencing similar obstacles on numerous occasions in 2007, many episodes of Billany's *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series* were claimed for copyright infringement and removed from his first channel LittleKuriboh until it was permanently disabled. Since December 2010, Billany's second account CardGamesFTW has similarly been suspended every few months as a result of copyright claims by Nihon Ad Systems, the Japanese company that produces the *Yu-Gi-Oh* anime series, and the automatic matches of YouTube's flawed Content ID system.³⁹⁷ In addition, Corrine Sudberg, the creator behind *Sailor Moon the Abridged Series*, had her channel for the series – Megami33 – terminated in late 2010 after their content was found via the system and they received multiple copyright claims from the owner of the *Sailor Moon* series, Toei Animation.³⁹⁸ Likewise, on August 12, 2009, Team Four Star's YouTube account was also suspended as a result of automated copyright claims against some of its *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* episodes from Toei.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, in May 2014, Team Four Star also announced the cancellation of their new abridged parody series of the *Attack on Titan* (2013-present) television anime series, *Attack on Titan Abridged*, after one episode following a copyright claim by the Japanese company Pony Canyon and other related legal issues.⁴⁰⁰

Following many complaints from similar amateur creators about how its copyright enforcement system did not take fair use into account when it claimed their content and a ruling

³⁹⁵ Heiden, e-mail message to author, April 4th, 2016.

³⁹⁶ See the description for the video "How Drugs Won The War 1 of 7," YouTube video, 3:55, May 17th, 2009, uploaded by "Pinesalad Productions," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvAQeBjTyEk>

³⁹⁷ For some of Billany's responses to these ongoing copyright strikes, see Martin Billany, "Important YGTOAS Announcement," YouTube video, 3:22, posted by "CardGamesFTW," June 19th, 2013,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hX19acET11I>; Martin Billany, "Important News Re: CardGamesFTW," YouTube video, 1:27, posted by "CardGamesFTW," July 22nd, 2012,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KFPBH24hPo>

³⁹⁸ "SMA Important Update," YouTube video, 0:43, posted by "SMAchannel," Oct. 26th, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLkPnL9pwl4>

³⁹⁹ Nick Landis (Lanipator), "Toei," *Lanipawned*, last modified August 12th, 2009, accessed April 10th, 2011, <http://lanipwned.blogspot.ca/2009/08/toei.html>

⁴⁰⁰ "TFS News May 20th: Titans Games and Cooler," YouTube video, 4:45, posted by "TeamFourStar," May 20th, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_IwzxuBKdA

in late 2015 within the *Lenz vs. Universal Music* case that required copyright holders to consider whether a use of their content is fair or not under U.S. law before issuing a removal notice⁴⁰¹ — a ruling that would provide some protection against copyright notices on social media platforms — YouTube itself would unveil, in November 2015, a new fair use protection program designed to “protect some of the best examples of fair use on YouTube by agreeing to defend them in court if necessary.”⁴⁰² However, despite this step, Google admits that they cannot offer legal protection to every video creator even if their work is fair use and, due to this limitation, this program only offers little “protection” to the vast majority of other YouTube creators like Billany or TeamFourStar whose appropriation-dependent abridged series could be argued to be fair use. As a result, one month later, on December 8th, 2015, automated content matches persisted and Team Four Star had 28 videos taken down out of 59 videos related to the *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* series — almost half of the content in this series — due to automated claims enabled by Content ID and once again originating from matches with content files provided by Toei. Furthermore, on February 23rd, 2016, more videos were taken down and their entire YouTube account was temporarily terminated due to the presence of four copyright strikes resulting once again from multiple third-party copyright infringement claims by Toei. Fortunately, a substantial amount of public pressure from fans of the series and the parody group’s Multi-Channel Network Screenwave Media caused the channel to be re-instated the following day on the 24th of February 2016.⁴⁰³ Many of these suspended accounts and their claimed content often return after fanvid creators file a counter-notification with YouTube characterizing their work as fair use. If that method does not succeed, their fanvid parody content is frequently mirrored and distributed by its fans on separate YouTube channels. While such copyright claims have been persistent over the years, since 2015, Toei has also increasingly begun to adopt the more inclusive stance towards fan-created content embodied Funimation and YouTube itself and opted to monetize some of the fanvid content which contains some of their intellectual property, if only intermittently. For instance, on the group's official sub reddit or the

⁴⁰¹ Sam Thielman, "YouTube 'dancing baby' Case Prompts Fair Use Ruling on Copyrighted Videos," *The Guardian*, September 15th, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/sep/15/youtube-dancing-baby-copyright-videos>

⁴⁰² Fred von Lohmann, “A Step Toward Protecting Fair Use on YouTube,” *Google Public Policy Blog*, November 19th, 2015, accessed on March 28th, 2016, <http://googlepublicpolicy.blogspot.ca/2015/11/a-step-toward-protecting-fair-use-on.html>

⁴⁰³ “TeamFourStar and YouTube: Where’s the Fair Use,” *YouTube*, YouTube video, 4:59, posted by “TeamFourStar,” Feb. 25th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eHbJ9U8YLY>

twitter page of its members, TeamFourStar's Frerichs and Landis have drawn attention to the fact that, although the fanvid group itself does not monetize episodes of *Dragon Ball Z Abridged*, Funimation and Toei Animation have repeatedly monetized the videos claimed on their behalf via YouTube's Content ID system with Toei increasingly adopting this more inclusive alternative strategy on the platform.⁴⁰⁴

Nevertheless, in response to the above Content ID claims on media that could be arguably engaging in the fair use appropriation of copyrighted media, popular YouTube creators like Team Four Star itself started a movement in February 2016 using social media and the Twitter hashtag WTFU — meaning Where's The Fair Use — with the goal of pressuring YouTube to change its automated approach to copyright enforcement and to better consider fair use.⁴⁰⁵ Although YouTube was ultimately pressured by this movement to change how Content ID distributes ad revenue following a claim by a copyright owner seeking to monetize the supposedly infringing content,⁴⁰⁶ it has not altered the manner in which Content ID can automatically claim user videos without determining whether their use of copyrighted content is fair or not. As a result, the creators of fanvid parody content on YouTube, such as abridged series, are still vulnerable to the arbitrary effects of this system's default structures on the distribution of their work. Although YouTube encourages and relies on the creative agency, tactics, and labour of its users while seeking to strategically channel and convert its often immaterial products into revenue, the producers of abridged series and fanvid parody content on the platform — despite the minor changes resulting from WTFU movement — continue to have very little substantive control or input when it comes to its primary copyright enforcement strategy as embodied by the Content ID system. This state of affairs evidently positioned these fanvid creators within an asymmetrical relationship with the managers of YouTube and the

⁴⁰⁴ Lanipator (@lanipator), "Well I guess Toei figured out a much more civil way of dealing with DBZA. You're welcome!," Twitter, December 27th, 2015, 11:45 AM, <https://twitter.com/lanipator/status/681199168380125184>; Kaiser0120 (Scott Frerichs), comment on "YouTube video channel 'TeamFourStar' has surpassed the mark of 600, 000, 000 views, and its approximate income for 30 days is \$432,900," Official TeamFourStar Sub Reddit, comment posted on April 25th, 2017, https://www.reddit.com/r/TeamFourStar/comments/67g1hq/youtube_video_channel_teamfourstar_has_surpassed/dgqgige/

⁴⁰⁵ "Where's The Fair Use? – Nostalgia Critic," YouTube video, 19:58, posted by "Channel Awesome," Feb 16th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVqFAMOtwaI>; "TeamFourStar and YouTube: Where's the Fair Use," YouTube, YouTube video, 4:59, posted by "TeamFourStar," Feb. 25th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eHbJ9U8YLY>

⁴⁰⁶ David Rosenstein, "YouTube Creator Blog: Improving Content ID for Creators," *YouTube Creator Blog*, April 28th, 2016, <http://youtubecreator.blogspot.ca/2016/04/improving-content-id-for-creators.html>

media corporations who had the most power over the functioning of the heavily automated Content ID system. In addition, it substantially undermined Web 2.0 discourse's propensity to characterize the user-generated media afforded by Web 2.0 platforms and these platforms themselves as being more autonomous and independent from traditional mass media industries all over the world when, in reality, they remain deeply interconnected and these industries continue to shape the conditions and limits of the participatory and collaborative online media ecosystem of which they are a part. The very connectivity Web 2.0 discourse tends to idealize also connects previously less visible and more informal amateur media practices more strongly to an emerging global network of established and emerging media corporations which often possess competing interests and are motivated by profit — alternative interests and values that compel them to form or contribute to an apparatus of media strategies that limit and exclude certain types of online user activity while encouraging and guiding others towards a preferable end.

Confronted with this power imbalance, certain creators of abridged parody series, like Billany in the aforementioned 50th episode of *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series* with its pronounced defence of fan creativity, would echo the critique of excessive and harmful forms of copyright enforcement seen within early fanvid parodies during the 1990s and implicitly criticize the restrictive use of YouTube's Content ID system and other copyright enforcement options like the more direct copyright takedown notice by American and Japanese media corporations. For example, the retired fanvid parody group TeamDN would even indirectly comment on this situation within its abridged series of the animated show *Death Note* (2006-2007). Later in the series, the supernatural Death Note of the show's title is acquired by the Yotsuba corporation who use its power to write down the names of business rivals and kill them. However, in the fourteenth episode of Team DN's abridged parody series, footage of this narrative arc is recontextualized through the original re-dubbed dialogue collaboratively performed by other creators of abridged series including TeamFourStar members like Frerichs. In the new incarnation of the scene, American-based animation distribution companies ironically represented by some of these fanvid parody creators are depicted using the notebook to kill the copyright infringing YouTube accounts of the abridging community, even though the majority of copyright claims and strikes affecting abridged series are usually the product of the original

Japanese copyright owners and their use of the Content ID system.⁴⁰⁷ Within the transformative work of creators like Billany and Team DN, the excessive regulation of fanvid parody videos on YouTube and the considerable power accorded to media corporations through its Content ID system and its copyright policy choices is openly criticized. Moreover, as already suggested by Billany's similarly critical engagement with the arbitrary form of copyright enforcement found on YouTube within his abridged series' 50th episode through the reconstructed dialogue of the character Joey Wheeler, the continuing production and dissemination of abridged series' parody episodes — a form of tactical resistance to the predominantly automated copyright claims of YouTube's system and the flexible apparatus of control it embodies — is driven by their creators' authentic form of affection for the animated Japanese texts appropriated.

The Relationship between Abridged Series Creators and the Animation Industry

However, rather than constructing the reductive dichotomy between fan resistance and capitalistic incorporation which is often present within fan studies according to Matt Hills,⁴⁰⁸ it is important to underscore the highly ambiguous status of the participatory activity of fanvid parody creators, especially their relation to the commodity culture prized by the copyright owners of the Japanese animated texts they transform. As articulated by Schäfer, the type of explicit participation embodied by the practice of fanvid parody "doesn't take place only in relation to existing media productions, nor is it necessarily opposed or in conflict with them."⁴⁰⁹ In his view, participation as a concept "cannot be assigned only to users who get involved with media and 'oppose' a dominant vendor" and, as reflected by YouTube itself, the participatory productivity reflected within user labour can often be implicitly channeled through particular design decisions.⁴¹⁰ On one hand though, the Western anime fans distributing contemporary fanvid parodies on YouTube, as seen in their earlier manifestations from the 1980s, can often tactically resist and criticize the profit-driven strategies adopted by the media industry, whether to enforce their ownership over particular animated properties or localize and alter the original content of animated Japanese texts to be broadcasted on North American television. Often, they criticize these strategies within the body of the transformative fanvid parodies they create by

⁴⁰⁷ See a re-upload of this episode "Death Note Abridged 14 Team Dattebayo," YouTube video, 7:50, posted by "Blake Rhys," April 14th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7xmLFk9yFU>

⁴⁰⁸ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36-41.

⁴⁰⁹ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 42.

⁴¹⁰ Schäfer, "Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation", 153.

substantively transforming the meaning of the footage from the original animated texts they appropriate. As suggested by Barbara Klinger, web-based parodies activate “multiple, conflicting meanings for texts” and prevent the media industry from having “the last word.”⁴¹¹ Elsewhere, Jonathan Gray has also similarly argued that viewer-created paratexts such as the fanvid parodies and abridged series described in this article ultimately challenge a text's preferred meanings.⁴¹² In her work on copyright law and fan culture, Rebecca Tushnet has asserted that, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, a transformative parody actually needs to comment on the original text to which it refers in order to receive protection under the fair use exception of copyright law.⁴¹³ Embodying this form of criticism, within the 18th episode of his parody-based *Yu-Gi-Oh the Abridged Series*, Billany carries on the tradition of earlier fanvid parodies from the 1980s when he directly criticizes the censorship of violence found within the original series' localization by 4kids Entertainment. In one scene, Yugi collapses during a card game with villain Pegasus as part of the Duelist Kingdom tournament and the Pharaoh, an Egyptian spirit living inside Yugi, declares “No! Yugi! You can't be dead. If you were dead, 4Kids would have censored it!”⁴¹⁴ Similarly, in the episode 47 entitled “Beyond the Fourth Wall,” a similar criticism of 4kids' censorship of personal violence and its infantilization of the original series occurs when Noah and his fellow villains are made to stand in for 4kids itself and threaten Yugi and his friends with gun turrets, which causes Joey to comment “Yeah, knowing 4Kids they probably just shoot harmless rubber bullets.”⁴¹⁵ The scene is then followed by the appearance of Team 4kids, a group of villains now transformed to be parodies of Team Rocket, central villains from the *Pokemon* anime series, with the help of a digital insert of the latter's *Pokemon* companion Meowth. This villainous group then declares:

Prepare for trouble,
And, make it double!
To protect the world from Japanimation!

⁴¹¹ Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 227.

⁴¹² Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 144-147.

⁴¹³ Rebecca Tushnet, “Copyright Law, Fan Practices, and the Rights of the Author,” *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. Eds. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 67-69.

⁴¹⁴ “YGOTAS Episode 18 - Turn Around, Bright Eyes,” YouTube video, 9:53, posted by “LittleKuriboh,” April 30th, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bpG0P1Ks_8

⁴¹⁵ “YGOTAS Episode 47 - Beyond the Fourth Wall,” YouTube video, 9:58, posted by “LittleKuriboh,” May 25th, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt2h09TrN3A>

To overthrow the Kaiba Corporation!
To denounce the meaning of the original dub!
To extend our reach to the world above!
Team 4kids blast off at the speed of light!
Surrender now or prepare to fight!⁴¹⁶

This original dialogue written by Billany openly criticizes the television production company 4kids Entertainment, which licensed and localized the television series *Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters* (2000-2004), for their inauthentic dubbing, localization, and censorship of the Japanese show's original content. Billany also criticizes the dubbing and localization of *Yu-Gi-Oh* by 4kids within several episodes of his abridged series by reproducing its dialogue in a mocking tone and inserting the inter-title "Actual 4kids Dialogue" to highlight its low quality. Engaging in similar transformative critiques of its central object of appropriation — the popular television anime series *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997) — the *Sailor Moon Abridged Series* directed by Sudberg parodies an 'educational' segment about the need to believe in yourself and work hard to achieve your goals included with DIC Entertainment's localization of the first episode of the *Sailor Moon* (1992-1993). In the re-dubbed context of the abridged series' first episode, the heroine Serena in this closing segment encourages the audience to avoid difficult exercise and develop an eating disorder if they want to be like her. This alteration mocks and undercuts the saccharine and didactic advice offered in the localization of the original series for its male and female audience members while darkly suggesting the potential bodily harm that may accompany Serena's desire to maintain the thin body type often privileged and fetishized within the "magical girl" or *mahou shoujo* genre of fantasy anime. Through their various transformations of the animated footage they appropriated and their fandubbed dialogue, the fanvid parody episodes of many abridged series subvert the meaning of a localized anime series, often criticizing the localization strategies of the American entertainment companies licensing and distributing Japanese animation — or, as seen earlier, the copyright enforcement choices of media corporations and YouTube — in a manner similar to the earlier parodies from the 1980s onwards.

While acknowledging the transformative character of online parody videos, Klinger also posits that parodies always reflect a tension between a desire to transform a particular fan-object

⁴¹⁶ "YGOTAS Episode 47 - Beyond the Fourth Wall," YouTube video, 9:58, posted by "LittleKuriboh," May 25th, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zt2h09TrN3A>

and a more affirmational affection for it.⁴¹⁷ For example, like the fanvid parodies from the 1980s, Billany's abridged series reveals a palpable sense of affective attachment for the *Yu-Gi-Oh* franchise including the English localization by 4Kids Entertainment it repeatedly criticizes. It specifically displays this appreciation for the latter localization by keeping its Americanized names, but also, more importantly, by emulating the vocal performances of its cast members like voice actor Wayne Grayson's interpretation of the character Joey Wheeler. This affection towards the English dub of a cherished series can also be felt within Team Four Star member Nick Landis's voice acting within the group's *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* series. Here, Landis' vocal performance respectfully echoes Christopher Sabat's popular vocal rendition of series characters Vegeta and Piccolo within the Funimation dub. This proximity between official voice actors in the industry and the amateur performers of fandubbed parodies is also reinforced by the latter's occasional desire to enter the professional realm of animation and media dubbing as well as their frequent interactions within anime conventions with the actors already thriving within this environment.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, despite the tendency of fan and digital media studies research and Web 2.0 discourse itself to position user-generated content and participatory fan activity in opposition to established media industries and their more commercial interests, the boundaries between the American media companies that localize and dub Japanese animation and the creators of non-profit parody-based abridged series like Billany and TeamFourStar have started to blur as the often immaterial social products of their labour — the affect-laden audience relationships and attention it cultivates — became increasingly visible to these corporations and their regular actors on social media platforms and within conventions. For instance, professional voice actor Christopher Sabat who worked for the Funimation dub of the *Dragon Ball Z* anime series would eventually have a cameo in Team Four Star's parody film *Bardock the Father of Goku Abridged* (2011). More reflective of this blurring of boundaries, however, is the growing

⁴¹⁷ Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*, 225-228.

⁴¹⁸ Examples of this type of interaction include TeamFourStar member Curtis Arnott (Takahata101), a voice-actor within *Dragon Ball Z Abridged*, engaging in some comedic improv and a conversation with Chris Sabat, a professional voice-actor for Funimation who voices the popular *Dragon Ball Z* character Vegeta, at the 2012 edition of the anime convention Sakura-Con. It is also reflected within a recent 2016 Panel entitled "DBZ OMG!" at the anime convention Youmacon where TeamFourStar members talked about the various incarnations of *Dragon Ball Z* with three English voice-actors associated with Funimation who worked within several of these iterations. See "Sakura-Con 2012 - Chris Sabat/Team Four Star - Over 9000," YouTube video, 2:22, posted by "Adam Hernandez," April 9th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq8dtjFQDqE&t=2s>; "[Convention Hopper] Youmacon 2016 - DBZ OMG!," YouTube video, 01:23:26, posted by "IX! Studios," November 12th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhbfcf2zQzZo>

incorporation of the amateur voice actors contributing to abridged series within the English-language localizations of Japanese animation and other properties by the aforementioned American companies who increasingly sought to channel the large and passionate audience relations created by their past labour — in other words, the commonly shared immaterial and social products it has cultivated — in order to draw additional attention to their productions. For his part, Billany has performed within the English dubs of Japanese animated film *K-on!* (2011) as a sushi shop owner and as in the animated television series *Ajin* (2016), both of which were licensed and localized by American corporation Sentai Filmworks and its production partners. Curtis Arnott of Team Four Star, otherwise known by the YouTube channel name and username Takahata101, has also provided a small amount of voice-over work for the new official English dubs of episodes of past anime series like *Zettai Muteki Rajin-Oh* (1991), but also the fighting role-playing game based on the *Dragon Ball Z* franchise, *Dragon Ball Xenoverse* (2015), and its sequel in 2016 along with a unaired and unreleased fragment within an episode of Funimation's *Dragon Ball Z Kai* (2009-2011). Within the first iteration of the *Dragon Ball Xenoverse* role-playing game, Arnott's comedic rendition of *Dragon Ball Z* villain Nappa within *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* is offered as a selectable character voice for the player's avatar.⁴¹⁹ Similarly, other members of Team Four Star like Scott Frerichs and Nick Landis have developed significant relationships with media distribution companies like Funimation, the company behind the English dubbing of *Dragon Ball Z* series. Specifically, they have undertaken a minor amount of voice acting and roles in many professional dubs of Japanese animation conducted by Funimation ranging from animated films like *Harmony* (2015), *Psycho-Pass: The Movie* (2015), and even *Dragon Ball Z: Resurrection 'F'* (2015) to television series like *One Piece* (1999-present), *Fairy Tail* (2009-2016), *Terror in Resonance* (2014), *Garo: The Animation* (2014-2015), *Chaos Dragon* (2015), and *Danganronpa 3: The End of Hope's Peak High School* (2016). Funimation even publicly promotes their inclusion within some of these productions on their official blog's English dub cast announcements for a few of their projects.⁴²⁰ In a posted review

⁴¹⁹ TeamFourStar (@TeamFourStar), "Excited about DragonBall Xenoverse? Well, our own @Takahata101 supplies the Create-A-Character Male Voice #8! And it's awfully familiar...!", Twitter, February 12th, 2015, 5:41 pm, <https://twitter.com/teamfourstar/status/566049418294484992>

⁴²⁰ See "Danganronpa 3: The End of Hope's Peak High School Broadcast Dub Announcement," *Funimation*, July 28th, 2016, <https://www.funimation.com/blog/2016/07/28/danganronpa-3-the-end-of-hopes-peak-high-school-broadcast-dub-cast-announcement/>; "Fairy Tail Part Twenty Cast Reveal," *Funimation*, June 1st, 2016, <https://www.funimation.com/blog/2016/06/01/fairy-tail-part-twenty-cast-reveal/>; "Chaos Dragon - English Cast Announcement," *Funimation*, September 29th, 2016, <https://www.funimation.com/blog/2016/09/29/chaos-dragon->

of the new *Dragon Ball Z: Resurrection 'F'* (2015), Team Four Star even discloses their increasingly interconnected relationship with Funimation by stating that they have "worked with Funimation in the past for ad campaigns and voice-over work."⁴²¹ Thus, along with other American licensing companies, Funimation has actively sought to capitalize on the popularity of TeamFourStar and collaborate with them by placing them in minor roles within their professional dubs of newly licensed animated films and series from Japan. Recently, the anime licensing and localization company Discotek Media announced that TeamFourStar would be producing an English dub for the DVD and Blu-ray releases of *Hells* (2008) — an animated film produced by Japanese animation studio Madhouse.⁴²² For their part, through their participation within the English localizations of animated Japanese content that they often criticize within their parody videos, the creators of abridged series reveal their genuine affection for such professional adaptations as well as the English dubbing process itself. As already suggested earlier in this chapter in relation to early fanvid parodies, this blurring of boundaries between these once amateur creators of parody-based abridged series and the American media companies that license and localize animated Japanese texts can also be felt through the similar dubbing, editing, and compositing techniques that they occasionally deploy to adapt them. For example, an abridged series' transformation of a Japanese animation program's footage and soundtrack through dubbing, editing, and compositing actually parallels the adaptive localization techniques of American production companies like 4Kids Entertainment, a resemblance that Billany himself recognized in a comment on his now defunct live journal account.⁴²³ An explicit recognition of this reality is even found within NoN.D.E. Fan Films' recent 2011 feature *Fanboy Soze* as it depicts villainous scheme of an evil corporation named Megatainment to use a powerful A.I. named GlaDos — named after the villain of the digital game *Portal* (2007) — to more efficiently re-cut, censor, and Americanize existing anime properties.⁴²⁴ This plan is designed to create alternate and equally inauthentic English adaptations of the Japanese television series *Dragon*

english-cast-announcement/

⁴²¹ "Review - Dragon Ball Z: Resurrection 'F'," *TeamFourStar*, August 3rd, 2015, <http://teamfourstar.com/review-dragon-ball-z-resurrection-f/>; "TFS Reviews: Dragon Ball Z Resurrection 'F'," YouTube video, 3:50, AUGUST 3RD, 2015, posted by "TeamFourStar," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRzWu30jXUI>

⁴²² Discotek Media, "Hells with a dub by @TeamFourStar is coming to DVD and Blu-ray," August 13th, 2017, 10:32 AM. Tweet.

⁴²³ Martin Billany, comment posted on Martin Billany, "Forever Young," *Little Kuriboh Live Journal*, last modified on July 11th 2006, accessed March 28th, 2011, <http://littlekuriboh.livejournal.com/1671.html> [site discontinued]

⁴²⁴ "Fanboy Soze Vs. The Reanimators of the Otakulypse," streaming video, 43:33, accessed August 2nd, 2017, <http://animefanparodies.org/dub/fanboy-soze-vs-the-reanimators-of-the-otakulypse/>

Ball Z, thus warranting the excessive production of version-specific merchandising. Eventually, the increasingly sentient A.I. begins to edit reality itself in an attempt to produce the magnum opus of anime music videos, a narrative twist that foregrounds the continuity existing between localization edits and the kind of alterations involved in an otaku fanvid production. Ironically, despite these parallels, it is the similarly 'inauthentic' transformations found within the fanvid parodies of abridged series along with the fan affect motivating the creative labour behind these alterations that ultimately give their creators a sense of ownership over their work while enabling them to defensively characterize it as fair use and continue circulating it online in defiance of the numerous copyright-related Content ID claims to which they are often subject on YouTube.

Despite the already mentioned tactical resistance of popular creators of abridged series like TeamFourStar and Billany to the arbitrary character of YouTube's partly automated copyright enforcement system and policy along with its strategic use by Japanese media corporations like Toei Animation, they still display support for the proprietary interests of the copyright owners and license holders of the Japanese anime series they appropriate and for U.S copyright law itself. This continuing support is evidence of the affective and interconnected relationship that these creators hold with the American distributors of Japanese animation and the original content owners who are responsible for the production and distribution of the animated media they love. It can manifest itself in the form of indirectly promotional video content supporting the upcoming release of a new official movie tied to the anime series they are appropriating or announcing new business ventures undertaken by the companies behind such series like Funimation.⁴²⁵ It can also reveal itself through the tendency of abridged series creators to have explicit disclaimers preceding their parody videos or on their websites that characterize their productions as non-profit parodies — a tactical gesture intended to identify the use of footage from pre-existing anime series as being fair use — and then attribute the ownership and creation of the appropriated material to the relevant rights holders and artists while urging the viewers to support the official release of an animation series.⁴²⁶ This latter call for support is also

⁴²⁵ Martin Billany, "YGO 3D Movie - February 26th," YouTube video, 2:29, posted by "LittleKuriboh," January 14th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgFD8psvLUA>; "TFS Reviews: Dragon Ball Z Resurrection 'F'," YouTube video, 3:50, posted by "TeamFourStar," August 3rd, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRzWu30jXUI>; "Funi-Roll - TFS News September 8th - TeamFourStar," YouTube video, 2:37, posted by "TeamFourStar," Sept. 8th, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=311s_vLEwsk

⁴²⁶ Examples of such disclaimers can and could be seen at the beginning of TeamFourStar's *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* series starting from episode 2 and on their website's FAQ page as well as that of Billany's now defunct

often present within the description section of their parody videos on YouTube and coupled with hyperlinks to the official store and anime streaming service subscription page of American distribution companies like Funimation that licensed the anime series they appropriate, so that their viewers can purchase merchandise and DVD boxsets related to such series or a subscription to a company's online collection of streaming animated content from Japan.⁴²⁷ This respect and affect of abridged series creators for the original creators of the anime series and the companies that adapt them also emerges amidst moments of tension with them, such as when they are subject to Content ID-enabled copyright claims from them. In the case of *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* group TeamFourStar, Toei Animation and its proprietary rights over the *Dragon Ball* series are often explicitly defended by its members against the anger of their fans and their affection for their favourite anime series and its original creators like Toei is occasionally expressed as a reason for their persistent support.⁴²⁸ Moreover, as in the fan-subtitling community, the creators of fanvid parodies and abridged series on YouTube also illustrate this deference towards the proprietary commercial interests of the copyright and license holders of the animated properties whose footage they use and their desire to avoid undermining them and risking a more serious legal form of copyright enforcement by tactically adopting a non-profit stance when it comes to their parody videos. This tactical adoption of a non-profit ethos mainly functions to strengthen a potential fair use defence when it comes to their work and thus offer some degree of protection against accusations of copyright infringement inside and outside the social media platforms where it is hosted. Team Four Star, in the FAQ of its website, even states that, when ads are present on episodes of their abridged series, "that is because it has a

Yugiohabridged site. See "Dragon Ball Z Abridged: Episode 2 - TeamFourStar (TFS)," YouTube video, 7:57, posted by "TeamFourStar," Jul. 9th, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBm_2IU4n4MU&list=PL6EC7B047181AD013&index=2; "TeamFourStar FAQ #1 - Team Four Star," *TeamFourStar*, September 11th, 2008, accessed July 12th, 2016, <http://teamfourstar.com/video/teamfourstar-faq-1/>; "About Us," *Yugiohabridged*, accessed on June 27th, 2014, <http://yugiohabridged.com/?p=about#terms> [site discontinued].

⁴²⁷ In order to see such supportive links, see the video description for a recent TeamFourStar episode of *Dragon Ball Z Abridged*, "DragonBall Z Abridged: Episode 58 - #CellGames / TeamFourStar (TFS)," YouTube video, 10:42, posted by TeamFourStar, May 12th, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLzV7fgdlvs>

⁴²⁸ See Nick Landis (Lanipator), "I Apologize...", YouTube video, 4:31, posted by "Lanipator," Jul. 7th, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aJpRHhFqk0>; TeamFourStar (@Teamfourstar), "To be clear on a very important subject: We bare no animosity or ill will against @ToeiAnimation over the past many years events," Twitter, Jul. 5th, 2017, 8:17 PM, <https://twitter.com/teamfourstar/status/882800633778196480>; TeamFourStar (@teamfourstar), "Nor should any of you, on our behalf. Copyright, fair use, etc. is a complicated subject to navigate. We understand their stance," Twitter, Jul. 5th, 2017, 8:18 PM, <https://twitter.com/teamfourstar/status/882800894290644992>; TeamFourStar (@Teamfourstar), "Please, continue to support the official release and the production of them. That's what we do, and what we honestly want to promote," Twitter, Jul. 5th, 2017, 8:20 PM, <https://twitter.com/teamfourstar/status/882801341080457220>

copyright claim on it. The copyright holder reserves the right to have advertisements run on our videos and profit from them."⁴²⁹ On the group's Patreon webpage — a crowdfunding platform seeking funds from fans to fund its more original, independent, and monetizable media content and original animation productions — TeamFourStar even declares that:

DragonBall Z Abridged and Hellsing Ultimate Abridged are strictly not-for-profit. We do not gain ad revenue from them, and though they may direct people to our peripheral content that **does** earn us money (**TFS Gaming, DBcember, Song Parodies**, etc.), we still have to pay our bills.⁴³⁰

While expressly asserting that the group is not "asking you to pay for DBZA or HUA" via its Patreon account, these two abridged series are also explicitly framed as "labors of love" — a characterization that reinforces their non-profit status, but also highlights how the affective and emotional attachment of their creators to the series they parody is the primary driving force behind the labour they invest in them. And, once again, they reiterate that:

If you have ever seen an advertisement on one of our DBZ or Hellsing videos on YouTube, understand that, that money is going to the owners of the footage, and very likely the owners of whatever music was used. It is 100% within their right to do so, and we fully understand and support their decision.⁴³¹

Interestingly, by characterizing their parodies as non-profit independent productions — which suggests a pre-emptive attempt to position them as engaging in the fair use of the appropriated footage — while conceding that the original series footage used is the property of its copyright owners, they are able to retain a sense of partial ownership over their transformative work and justify its continued distribution to Western anime fans.

Affect and Alternative Distribution and Funding Tactics of Abridged Series Creators

Despite using such defensive tactics within and outside the boundaries of YouTube, the negative effects of the platform's heavily automated copyright enforcement system and its takedown notice tool for media corporations on the creative agency of amateur users like the producers of abridged series persist. Consequently, in defiance of these unique obstacles within Web 2.0-based media platforms, abridged series creators like TeamFourStar and Billany and their fans —influenced by their persistent affective attachment to specific Japanese animated

⁴²⁹ "Frequently Asked Questions," *TeamFourStar*, March 22nd, 2014, accessed July 18th, 2016, <http://teamfourstar.com/frequently-asked-questions-2/>

⁴³⁰ "TeamFourStar is Creating Laughter," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>

⁴³¹ "TeamFourStar is Creating Laughter," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>

texts and the partial sense of ownership over their work stemming from the labour and affect driving their transformative creativity — have taken to re-uploading and circulating these parodies elsewhere on other YouTube channels, social media platforms, and within alternative platforms like The Internet Archive as well as more informal file-sharing sites. Similarly, parody groups from the past like Corn Pone Flicks and PineSalad Productions and their longstanding fans often use distribution platforms besides YouTube like Vimeo, Dailymotion, and informal torrent sites to host and circulate their content, often as a means to circumvent the arbitrary effects of the Google platform's automated copyright enforcement system. In fact, from May 2013 to the present, an alternative media platform entitled animefanparodies.org was even created to more permanently host a sizable collection of fanvid parodies from the late 1980s onwards that would exist outside the negative effects stemming from the automated content filtering systems of social media platforms like YouTube. More significant, however, is the constituent power implicit within the affect-driven labour of Billany and TeamFourStar and its deployment to circumvent the heavily automated copyright enforcement strategies of YouTube and the wider apparatus of flexible control they embody by creating alternative distribution platforms for their parody episodes beyond YouTube such as teamfourstar.com and yugiohabridged.com. In these spaces, their fanvid content was initially hosted via seemingly more accommodating commercial media platforms like Blip TV. However, due to this reliance on other hosting platforms, the re-situated fanvid content accessible via these alternative distribution sites created by fans would become as vulnerable to the effects of platform-related decisions as on YouTube. For instance, Billany's initial distribution platform yugiohabridged.com was eventually closed in 2014 due to the planned purge of user accounts on the now defunct social media platform Blip TV once owned by Maker Studios — the platform which Billany used to host his video content— and all episodes of *Yu-Gi-Oh The Abridged Series* were transferred in their entirety to the Team Four Star website, which was partnered with the online Multi-Channel network and video platform provider Screenwave Media.⁴³² The constituent dimension of the labour undertaken by the creators of abridged series and other

⁴³² "LittleKuriboh on TeamFourStar.com?!", *TeamFourStar*, September 15th, 2014, accessed July 18th, 2016, <http://teamfourstar.com/littlekuriboh-teamfourstar-com/>; Martin Billany, "LittleKuriboh Sells Out," YouTube video, 6: 21, posted by "LittleKuriboh," August 31st, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0FG6LJxxSk>; Ingrid Lunden, "Maker Studios Culls Content on Blip's Video Platform," *TechCrunch*, last modified on May 29th, 2014, accessed on June 27th, 2014, <http://techcrunch.com/2014/05/29/blip-downsizing/>

fanvid parodies — which is often driven by their affect for the properties they parody while simultaneously disseminating it to others — enables them to construct alternative spaces where fellow otaku can access their work in a more persistent manner away from the restrictive effects of the significantly automated filtering and copyright enforcement systems increasingly adopted by social media platforms as a means to continue including a widening range of user-generated content without having to assume the cost of managing their inclusion or exclusion during the uploading stage.

Nevertheless, although this otaku activity may seem to have avoided the capitalistic apparatus of control strategies resulting from YouTube's intersection with contemporary copyright law and the proprietary interests of mass media corporations like Toei, the free, immaterial, and affect-driven labour driving fandubbed productions and these alternative platforms remain connected to what Terranova terms “a field that is always and already capitalism.”⁴³³ For instance, while indirectly functioning as a promotional site for the series parodied and remaining linked to the profit-driven strategies of online media partners like Screenwave Media, the current incarnation of TeamFourStar.com features banner and video ads that surround their content and parallel the ad-based attention economy of YouTube and other websites less associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm, even though the revenue for the video-based ads ultimately go to the copyright owners. Excluding its obvious lack of an elite pay-based subscription package, its streaming features, interface, community forums, and sale of merchandise echo several of the elements found on Funimation's official website or on anime streaming platforms like Crunchyroll. Similarly to these sites and platforms with their complementary media distribution and community functions, TeamFourStar.com initially provided a space in which the deeply affective relationships TeamFourStar have cultivated with their fans can further grow within forums and wherein this passionate audience can access and discuss their work, expand its size, and thrive as a community of anime fans. The forum features of earlier versions of this website harken back to the pre-existing and supposedly pre-Web 2.0 spaces of the Internet and Western anime fandom. Recently, however, these forum features were abandoned in a 2014 update due to the time constraints associated with managing a forum and a moderated official sub reddit dedicated to conversation about the group, which is

⁴³³ Tiziana Terranova, “Free Labor,” *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 38-39.

accessible via the site, was constructed as a substitute.⁴³⁴ As already suggested by Manovich with regard to user-generated social media content, the online user tactics and media of fanvid parody creators have thus started to parallel some of the strategies of commercial culture including those of the digital economy to which social media platforms contribute while also becoming interconnected with these strategies.⁴³⁵ For instance, echoing the sale of merchandise found on the websites of American anime licensing companies or streaming platforms like Crunchyroll, earlier and current versions of TeamFourStar.com similarly offer fans the ability to purchase TeamFourStar-related merchandise that can benefit them financially and help them cover the website's hosting costs. More specifically, through TeamFourStar.com and their YouTube channels, TeamFourStar and Billany often promote the sale of commodities like T-Shirts, prints, and buttons related to *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* and *Yu-Gi-Oh The Abridged Series* — items that are accessible via a provided link to the merchandising site Shark Robot and which are often typically sold by popular YouTubers on similar sites. This merchandise contains original scripted content from each abridged series and unique artwork that occasionally features altered character designs and situations close to that of the Japanese animation series *Dragon Ball Z*, but which remains predominantly distinct from the latter. Referring to their T-shirt designs, TeamFourStar even state on its Patreon page that they have "worked with several people to make sure that all our designs fall under copyright parody laws."⁴³⁶ While defending the group's non-profit status, Frerichs of Team Four Star has asserted that the money received from such merchandise is primarily directed towards the purchase of new recording and editing equipment.⁴³⁷ Evidently, in combination with their eventual Patreon page and the donations of subscribers, the revenue accumulated from the sale of this merchandise would also be used to partially fund the costs related to the hosting of TeamFourStar.com and to their frequent travel to North American anime conventions. Nevertheless, this reliance on merchandising interestingly parallels the American and Japanese animation industry's own dependence on the sale of merchandise featuring

⁴³⁴ "Frequently Asked Questions," *TeamFourStar.com*, accessed August 5th, 2017, <http://teamfourstar.com/frequently-asked-questions-2/>

⁴³⁵ Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?," 323-324.

⁴³⁶ "TeamFourStar is creating Laughter," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>

⁴³⁷ Scott Frerichs (KaiserNeko), "The shirts are our own creations...", comment posted on TeamFourStar, "TeamFourStar Super T-Shirt Event" video, November 10, 2010, accessed March 25th, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=GeK4y6wHjqQ

cherished characters from animated films and television series while reinforcing the proximity of their amateur creativity to a similar form of capitalistic economy.

Further reflecting the inseparability of user-driven media practices, whether or not they rely on the transformative appropriation of existing media content, with the emerging and residual media industries surrounding them and their strategies, TeamFourStar itself has shed light on how their continued refusal to directly monetize their non-profit parody episodes and the geographical distance of its members has compelled them to pursue different sources of revenue to fund their future creative activities, centralize and professionalize their activities within and outside the TeamFourStar website, and facilitate greater forms of collaboration.⁴³⁸ Aside from merchandise sales, the group has sought to accumulate this revenue through the creation and hosting of alternative media content on their YouTube channels and their website like gameplay commentary videos,⁴³⁹ whose particular monetization with ads on YouTube, as will be detailed in the subsequent chapter, is accepted to a greater degree by media corporations than other appropriation-based and user-driven online media practices. The latter type of content, which Billany also produces, involves fanvid creators capturing their gameplay of particular digital games while offering simultaneous audio commentary, occasionally from the fictional perspective of specific parody incarnations of existing anime characters from their abridged series such as the supporting character Krillin from *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* or the villain Marik from *Yu-Gi-Oh The Abridged Series*. Beyond the TeamFourStar website and YouTube itself, a few abridged series creators like TeamFourStar and Billany have begun to encourage fans to donate money on a monthly basis through the crowdfunding platform Patreon.⁴⁴⁰ While stating that the donations would not be to access or buy their abridged series, which would remain freely accessible, TeamFourStar explain on their Patreon profile that the money would be directed towards the purchase of new equipment and software and the hiring of animators and editors to help them with current projects like *Dragon Ball Z Abridged*; however, the funds accumulated

⁴³⁸ "The Future of TeamFourStar," YouTube video, 4:30, posted by "TeamFourStar," Dec. 4th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA6sPyxz7GI>

⁴³⁹ "The Future of TeamFourStar," YouTube video, 4:30, posted by "TeamFourStar," Dec. 4th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA6sPyxz7GI>

⁴⁴⁰ "TeamFourStar is Creating Laughter," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>; "Team Four Star Made a Patreon," YouTube video, 6:53, posted by "TeamFourStar," May 20th, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hideuJvRhmk>; "Why LittleKuriboh is on Patreon," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/littlekuriboh>; Martin Billany, "LittleKuriboh's Dramatic Patreon Announcement," YouTube video, 4:57, posted by "LittleKuriboh," August 24th, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bvGhzLQbCY>

through the Patreon page, as stated within its description, are predominantly intended to finance the group's desire to become a professional studio focused on the production of original animated content that is less reliant on pre-existing copyrighted material.⁴⁴¹ As of October 18th 2017, TeamFourStar receives a total of 12, 472 U.S dollars monthly from 2,813 patrons.⁴⁴² At the same time, on his Patreon page, Billany receives 4, 483 U.S. dollars per month from 784 patrons — funds which are intended to hire editors to edit *Yu-Gi-Oh The Abridged Series* episodes according to a more consistent schedule, explore original projects, rent studio space for video production, and cut down on anime convention appearances, a key source of income for Billany along with merchandising.⁴⁴³ This use of crowdfunding on Patreon allows TeamFourStar and Billany to meet the rising and associated costs of their transformative fan activity and, now, of their original works of animation and fund the time-consuming work necessary to complete them without compromising their non-profit opposition to the direct commercial sale and monetization of their fanvid parodies. Although the creators of the abridged series that emerged from YouTube since 2006 refuse to directly sell their work like past fanvid parody creators, their affective desire to continue creating and distributing transformative works online and at conventions, nevertheless, can often lead them towards alternative funding strategies. Many of these monetization strategies seek to channel the affect-laden audience relationships — or the common social products — that they have initially built and produced within YouTube's attention economy and, later, within their websites and convert them into enough revenue that they can sustain and expand their creative activity to more original works of animation. As reflected in their increasing professional employment by American licensing companies and the revenue they accumulate through the above alternative monetization strategies, the amateur creators of the increasingly visible fanvid parodies and abridged series originally based on YouTube, through their participatory and collaborative activity on the platform, are empowered financially and by the passionate audience relationships they have been able to acquire on it. However, contrary to the more utopian vision of individualistic and collective empowerment and independence outside the realm of mass media industries — a narrative associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm and platforms shaped by it like YouTube — these creators and their transformative

⁴⁴¹ "Why TeamFourStar is on Patreon," *Patreon*, accessed July 20th, 2016, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>

⁴⁴² "TeamFourStar is Creating Laughter," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/tfs>

⁴⁴³ "Why LittleKuriboh is on Patreon," *Patreon*, accessed October 18th, 2017, <https://www.patreon.com/littlekuriboh>

appropriation-based productions are subject to a new paradigm of flexible control that supports an emerging communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism. Within this paradigm, an apparatus of discursive and non-discursive strategies function to encourage and include the online activity of creative users, so it can then be flexibly controlled and channeled for profit. Manifesting itself through Web 2.0 discourse, but also a strategic deployment of copyright rhetoric and heavily automated content filtering systems like Content ID, this apparatus emerges from the dynamic connections surfacing between contemporary copyright law in the U.S., the proprietary interests of established and emerging media corporations, and the profit motive of user-driven online media platforms like YouTube and the capitalistic entities that are increasingly connected to it. YouTube relies on these strategies to include the implicit and anticipated participation and collaboration of fanvid parody producers within its platform, but also satisfy the basic requirements of the DMCA and the proprietary interests of existing media partners. Other complementary strategies intended to include the creativity of online users are felt within the decision of Funimation and Discotek Media to invite the creators of abridged series to participate and collaborate with them as English voice actors within their licensed animated productions and publicize this participation as a means to draw more promotional attention to such projects. They are also embodied by the plans of Funimation and Kadokawa to monetize fan-made videos. Ultimately, while seemingly empowering amateur fanvid parody groups and individual creators like TeamFourStar and Billany to independently distribute their own content and collaborate with media corporations as promised within the individualistic and collaborative incarnations of Web 2.0 discourse, the type of tactical creative agency — which they embody with their transformative appropriation tactics — is still significantly limited as a result of the increasing prominence of automated and algorithmic forms of copyright enforcement strategies within this emerging apparatus of flexible control along with the residual connection of Web 2.0 platforms to mass media industries like film and television. In addition, less popular creators of parody-based abridged series are similarly vulnerable to these emerging content filtering strategies and, often, they are unable to reach the same level of popularity and financial empowerment as groups and practitioners like TeamFourStar and Billany. However, as illustrated in the previous paragraphs, the affective passion of contemporary fanvid parody creators for the animated material they were parodying — which was driving their creative labour and its constituent dimension while being spread to their audience — and the extensive emotional relationships they

cultivated with their own fannish audiences would often enable them to constitute new online spaces to distribute their content, circumvent the above copyright enforcement strategies, and allow their fans to discuss this work. It also allowed them to undertake alternative funding tactics that enable them to continue creating and circulating their parody episodes without selling them for profit.

Ultimately, from the 1980s onwards, this same affective drive has expanded the reach of transformative fanvid parodies onto social media platforms like YouTube and become increasingly visible within this space where they have continued to criticize the inauthenticity of English localizations of Japanese animation and the occasionally excessive enforcement of U.S. copyright law by the original owners of this animation or the American entertainment companies that license these properties. Despite this seemingly oppositional stance to the various strategies of the mass media industries that produce, adapt, and distribute Japanese animation like television within Japan and North America, the practitioners of fanvid parodies and their predominantly non-profit values have always had a complicated and interconnected relationship with these industries and their practices while also retaining a considerable amount of respect for these creators, content owners, and distributors as well as for their proprietary interests and for U.S. copyright law in general. More recently, despite the promise of greater creative autonomy away from the influence of mass media industries which is often attached to the user-driven online media ecosystem they have come to inhabit, certain amateur creators of the parody-based abridged series on YouTube along with the immaterial and affective products of their already affect-driven labour have started to become incorporated into — and channeled by — such professional media companies and the more inclusive promotional and monetization strategies they enact within and outside Google's platform as a result of their heightened visibility in this connected environment. Moreover, while echoing some of the formal techniques adopted to localize Japanese animation, the tactics adopted by these emerging fanvid parody creators to enable them to continue the production and distribution of their transformative work have also begun to involve the selling of design-focused merchandise, which paralleled similar commercial strategies within the animation industry and the tactics of social media celebrities. Reflecting their immersion within a Web 2.0 environment and undercutting the often dominant conception of fan creativity and user-generated content as being disconnected from the capitalistic realm of money, the tactical commitment of fanvid parody creators to avoid selling their fanvid

productions is balanced with other monetization tactics intended to help them expand their creative ambitions and pay for the related costs of production, distribution, and convention attendance: specifically, the monetization of their growing fanbase via the adoption of less vulnerable Web 2.0 practices like gameplay commentary on YouTube as well as the adoption of the subscription-based crowdfunding platform Patreon. As their affection for the original Japanese animation they appropriate has led fanvid parody creators like the producers of abridged series to create original transformative works and enter into complicated and supportive relationships with established and emerging media industries and platforms and their commercial strategies, the labour shaped by it has also constructed alternative distribution platforms and communal spaces where their video parodies are seemingly safer from the negative consequences of such relations and where their fans can freely congregate. Even as they are still connected to the more inclusive strategies of control and monetization tied to the apparatus emerging within the user-driven online media ecosystem shaped by communicative capitalism, the above spaces offer them greater protection to them and their fanvid parodies, even if only temporary and minimal, from it, specifically the effects and constraints stemming from its strategic and increasing adoption of heavily automated and biased content filtering and copyright enforcement systems to manage the seemingly endless range of user-generated content found on social media platforms like YouTube. Due to their strong affective attachment to the Japanese animation they parody and satirize and the online communities this shared love has cultivated, the creators of fanvid comedies thus seek to simultaneously affirm the work of the animated industry, but also transform it into original creative works that they can call their own, share them with Western anime fandom, foster deeper and emotionally satisfying relationships with its members, and sustain and expand their creative autonomy. It is this affective dimension that propels the producers of fanvid parodies, especially abridged series, to invest so much time, labour, and expense into further developing and circulating them, constituting new cultural spaces and platforms to host and discuss this Western otaku creativity, and devising alternative means to independently fund this work while striving to adhere to their non-profit ethos and retaining a relative and minimal degree of tactical autonomy from Japanese and American media industries along with the effects of their more restrictive strategies and their profit-driven values.

Thus, although Web 2.0-based media platforms like YouTube increasingly appears to enable the tactical agency and affect-driven labour of users to produce creative works of media

and cultivate passionate audience relations while promising them a truly empowering foundation with little constraint from its managers, contemporary YouTube-based fanvid parody producers like the creators of abridged series — and other creative user activities that rely on the appropriation of existing media — provide a useful example of the illusory character of this idealistic promise and the more complicated reality hidden behind it. While platforms like YouTube can empower these types of fanvid creators in a significant manner as seen with the increasing integration of TeamFourStar members within the professional industry of animation dubbing and their emergence as a more professional production studio in itself, the strategies they adopt to enforce the copyright claims of contemporaneous media corporations and partners impose substantial limitations on their creative agency and tend to contribute to an asymmetrical power relation with these capitalistic entities wherein they are accorded more control and power over the management functions within these emerging platforms than the very users that sustain and drive them. In spite of such obstacles, the very creative and tactical agency that platforms like YouTube seek to encourage within its users and then channel and control through strategies of inclusion and which drives the often immaterial labour of creators like fanvid parody producers also carries a constituent potential that allows them to continue producing and circulating their creative work as well as constructing and adopting alternative platforms and tactical practices designed to partially resist and circumvent some of these constraints.

Chapter Three: The Commercialization and Flexible Capture of Game Commentary

In the previous case study analysis, the affect-driven creative agency and labour behind the social media incarnation of transformative and non-profit fanvid parodies — the abridged series — along with their immaterial products were revealed to be increasingly incorporated, channeled, and constrained by the strategies of flexible control and inclusion adopted by YouTube and established media licensing and production companies. Reinforced by the strategic use of Web 2.0 and copyright discourse, these strategic approaches to controlling and limiting the creative autonomy embodied by YouTube-based fanvid parody creators were then situated as part of a growing apparatus which supports the communicative brand of neoliberal capitalism currently shaping our twenty first century user-driven online media ecosystem. As a result, they came to partially undermine the idealistic vision of radical creative empowerment and greater autonomy from the restrictive influence of mass media industries over the realm of cultural production and distribution — a vision which is often articulated with online media platforms that embody many of the stated principles of the Web 2.0 paradigm like YouTube. However, despite the constraints associated with this new mode of flexible control, the affection for Japanese animation and particular animated texts, which partly motivated the free digital labour and transformative creativity of Western-based fanvid parody creators on YouTube, and the affect-laden audience relationships it cultivated within it could also have constituent effects. Informing their non-profit values, this persistent affect could compel them to construct and adopt alternative funding tactics and distribution platforms in order to sustain and expand their creative activity, cultivate a community of fans outside of Google's platform, and circumvent one particular strategy of control increasingly found within this user-centered online ecosystem: the strategic deployment of heavily automated digital fingerprinting and filtering systems and notice and takedown processes.

Building on this critical and political-economic analysis of parody-based abridged series on Google's platform, the contemporary online form of user-generated content, which is the central case study in this section's second chapter, involves another appropriation-centered and YouTube-based social media practice: the video-based incarnation of gameplay commentary and its serial counterpart, the Let's Play. As already briefly detailed in this dissertation's introduction, gameplay commentary, in its present form, usually entails the audiovisual capture of footage and audio from a digital game being played by an individual along with a recording of his or her

voice-over commentary about this game or performance. The end result is then typically uploaded onto video-based social media platforms like YouTube to be viewed by users with a shared passion and interest in games or a specific performer. Conversely, while taking a variety of forms, Let's Plays — a subgenre of gameplay commentary — typically manifest themselves within this ecosystem as completed video-based playthroughs of a particular game, which are audiovisually captured by a player and subsequently converted into a series of episodes with accompanying commentary delivered via voice-over or text-based subtitles. Often, these Let's Play episodes are organized within YouTube playlists as part of a particular series of videos in a manner similar to abridged series, thus reflecting the continuing influence of YouTube's architectural features on the form and presentation of its user-generated content.

To a greater extent than abridged series and their fanvid parody episodes, however, this chapter will examine gameplay commentary videos as examples of a more individualistic and contemporary form of user-generated content that has come to be flexibly controlled through various strategies in service of the capitalistic and promotional desires of YouTube and the media corporations surrounding it. More specifically, it will reveal how the latter entities seek to benefit and profit from the voluntarily given digital labour associated with gameplay commentary videos and from the affect-laden audience relationships they cultivate. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate how this capitalistic desire — in combination with the specific affordances and values of YouTube — has substantially shaped and affected the form, content, commentary style, and distribution of their videos. However, it will also expose how the online forum environment of the comedy website Something Awful (SA) and, more specifically, its subforum dedicated to the production and distribution of Let's Plays — a key space where gameplay commentary was initially popularized and where its earlier practitioners congregated — influence the practice's form and content along with the alternative media platforms occasionally adopted by the creators connected to this space. More importantly, in contrast to Web 2.0 discourse's implicit framing of platforms like YouTube as impartial foundations for the radical empowerment of amateur media creator, this section's last chapter will argue how the digital labour of gameplay commentators and the media and affective and attention-based relationships it cultivates with their viewers are frequently encouraged, controlled, and flexibly channeled in support of game companies, Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs), and the owners of social media platforms. For instance, it will foreground how the idealistic promise of

empowerment through participation and play often cultivated by social media platforms such as YouTube and contemporary media corporations like MCNs is a discursive strategy within an emerging apparatus of control that holds the potential to encourage and guide the creative agency of online users like gameplay commentators towards a profitable end. Furthermore, it will also illustrate how, while often attracted by this discourse and the affectively charged belief in the potential for citizen empowerment and heightened pleasure it shapes and by the specific distribution and monetization features afforded by platforms like YouTube, gameplay commentators are active and voluntary participants in their predominantly ad-driven attention and affective economies as well as the social media marketing campaigns of game companies occurring within them. More specifically, it will foreground how commentators voluntarily participate within specific platforms like YouTube and willingly enter into the unequal power relationships often produced by the apparatus of control strategies emerging within them — a choice that partly results from these platforms' monopolistic dominance of the sphere of online video streaming, but also from their promise of a greater opportunity for citizens to express and empower themselves, whether creatively or financially. Even though the active participation of online users like gameplay commentators within YouTube reveals the relative degree of tactical agency that they still possess within this space and, in some cases, does empower them, this chapter will also demonstrate how, due to this platform choice, they are often situated within asymmetrical relations of power, inequality, and exploitation that are the product of a communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and its supporting apparatus of discursive statements, copyright legislation, and platform-related strategies, policies, and architectural choices. Encompassing play-centric Web 2.0 rhetoric, digital video fingerprinting and filtering systems like Content ID meant to enforce copyright law, monetization strategies, and various types of contracts, this apparatus' strategies of control will be revealed within this chapter to be typically enacted by the social media platform owners and the corporate media actors currently inhabiting the increasingly participatory networked media ecosystem of the twenty first century, so as to profitably encourage, control, and channel the productivity of creative online users. Moreover, this chapter will demonstrate how, like fanvid parody creators, YouTube-based gameplay commentators are accorded very little control over the platform's always changing architectural and policy-related decisions — which are strategically undertaken to control and monetize its user-generated content — and, as a result, are highly vulnerable to the numerous

creative constraints and effects they introduce. Contrary to the more utopian incarnations of Web 2.0 discourse, it will also uncover how YouTube's unique rules, affordances, and content filtering and monetization systems like Content ID along with the complementary promotional and monetization strategies of the game companies and MCNs connected to Google's social media platform often situate gameplay commentators within unequal power relations and value exchanges of which they are consciously aware. Similar to abridged series, this type of power imbalance will again be shown to be the product of the disproportionate amount of control that the above corporate media actors hold within social media platforms. Specifically, this power asymmetry will be demonstrated to be partly the result of the large amount of control they possess over the strategic deployment of systems like Content ID and of partnership contracts, all in order to control and profitably channel the immaterial products of gameplay commentators' digital labour — or, more specifically, the attention-based and affect-laden relationships they cultivate with their viewers and the affective responses their audiovisual performances often evoke within them. Despite the disproportionate amount of power held by various media corporations tied to the Web 2.0 ecosystem of social media platforms, this chapter will also illustrate how gameplay commentators are embedded within the capitalistic and neoliberal attention economy of YouTube wherein their productive and playful participation can financially and creatively empower them to a greater degree than non-profit fanvid parodies due to the digital game industry's more widespread tolerance of gameplay commentary's appropriation of its media properties. Ultimately, this chapter's critical analysis of the predominantly YouTube-based practice of gameplay commentary and the complex power relations that form around it will complicate reductive narratives within digital media studies about the coercive character of the exploitation of networked user-labourers while acknowledging the actual forms of empowerment that are afforded by social media platforms to online users who engage in the distribution of media content like gameplay commentary videos whose monetization is openly encouraged, tolerated, and channeled by their owners and the diverse array of media corporations that inhabit this twenty first century online ecosystem of user-generated media content.

However, before investigating the complicated and frequently unequal relations of power and exchange within which gameplay commentators would come to be situated within YouTube — a reality that partly undercuts its implicit and explicit representation within discourse about Web 2.0 platforms and Google's own rhetoric as a foundation for the transformative

empowerment of connected and creative citizens — it is necessary to examine the origins and development of gameplay commentary and game spectatorship as well as their different manifestations over time including the Let's Play format that emerged within SA's Games subforum and, eventually, its dedicated Let's Play subforum. It is also essential to detail the varying types of motivations driving the creation and public distribution of gameplay commentary videos online and their viewership. Expanding the concept of play beyond the player's immediate interactions with a game, this account of the emergence of gameplay commentary videos will trace how something as seemingly ephemeral as play gradually became a productive form of labour and a mappable media object of spectatorial consumption that would benefit a wide range of social and economic actors within the twenty first century's user-driven online media ecosystem and the communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism that drives it.

Gameplay Commentary and the Emergence of the Let's Play Sub-genre

As already addressed within the opening paragraphs of this dissertation, a growing variety of media corporations like Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Warner Bros would begin to invest in social media platforms and MCNs dedicated to gameplay commentary like YouTube Gaming, Twitch, and Machinima Inc, so as to include the creative agency of their users and partners and then profitably channel its immaterial products. Simultaneously, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, digital game companies themselves would also similarly actively seek to flexibly include the productive and playful labour of gameplay commentary within its promotional and monetization strategies, so as to primarily benefit from it. While all of the above media corporations increasingly began to integrate the YouTube-based incarnation of gameplay commentary and profitably extract its value through a variety of platform-related strategies including the use of Content ID and sponsorship deals, popular creators of gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays like PewDiePie would also start to be driven by the pursuit of ad revenue on the platform— an extrinsic drive that could often result in the accumulation of a significant amount of capital and radically empower them within the emerging digital economy of this ecosystem.

However, while always being inherently connected to the video game industry, gameplay commentary was not always so profitable for its amateur practitioners or perceived as potential sources of direct revenue by other interests, nor did they fully originate within an online environment typically articulated with the Web 2.0 paradigm. Instead, one of the most dominant

incarnations of gameplay commentary, the Let's Play, initially emerged out of online forums — a residual web environment more strongly associated with an earlier 1.0 phase of the Internet in existence several decades prior to the twenty first century. For instance, as confirmed by game industry reporter Patrick Klepek, Let's Play rose to prominence from 2005 onwards within the games-related subforums of the previously mentioned Something Awful (SA) website as an online practice that initially involved the representation of a player's complete playthrough and experience of a digital game within a specific forum thread intended for that purpose through the use of text-based commentary in conjunction with embedded or linked screenshots of captured moments of gameplay.⁴⁴⁴ Updates for the playthrough were released episodically for free as entries for forum members within a single thread. This Let's Play format partially echoed the pre-existing After-Action Report mode of forum-based fan fiction associated with strategy-based games.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, a prototypical text-based "strategy guide" of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (1990) by future gameplay commentator Slowbeef pre-existed the practice's growing popularity within SA's forum environment and, launched in 2004, its use of captured screenshots of a player's performance of an entire game in conjunction with comedic commentary about it also anticipated this textual incarnation of the forum-based Let's Play series and its commentary.⁴⁴⁶ Despite the existence of such precursors outside the boundaries of what would eventually come to be an SA subforum dedicated to Let's Play, Let's Plays were initially predominantly produced and distributed by its members within the more communal online environment that this forum cultivated — a networked environment whose alternative cultural values privileged creativity and quality over popularity and did not actively encourage users to profit or seek some form of exposure from their gameplay commentary videos, at least to the degree that YouTube would encourages its creative users and, eventually, the gameplay commentators inhabiting the

⁴⁴⁴ Patrick Klepek, "Who Invented Let's Play Videos?," *Kotaku*, June 5th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/who-invented-lets-play-videos-1702390484>

⁴⁴⁵ For some research on this past brand of game-related fan fiction, the after-action report, see Souvik Mukherjee, "The Playing Fields of Empire: Empire and Space in Video Games" (lecture, 7th International Conference on the Philosophy of Computer Games, Bergen, Norway, October 2013); Souvik Mukherjee, "Rewriting Unwritten Texts: After-Action Reports and Video games" (lecture, 'Under the Mask' Conference at the University of Bedfordshire, June 2011); and Souvik Mukherjee, *Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 110-113.

⁴⁴⁶ Patrick Klepek, "Who Invented Let's Play Videos?," *Kotaku*, June 5th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/who-invented-lets-play-videos-1702390484>; For the "strategy guide" itself, see Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "Slow Beef's Strategy Guide to Metal Gear Solid 2: Solid Snake," *Effinslowbeef.com*, accessed August 17th, 2017, <http://effinslowbeef.com/MG2/mgi001.html>

platform to monetize the audience relationships resulting from their produced media content. Because they were not predominantly driven by a desire to accumulate a wide enough audience to profitably commodify through the media they create, early Let's Players on SA were less likely to produce the type of gameplay commentary videos that one could reliably expect to be popular and obtain high viewership numbers — in other words, less likely to create social media which would be more homogeneous in style and content due to its creators' desire to reproduce large audience numbers with each uploaded video and to expand their viewership. Frequently driven by an affective passion for the specific game appropriated or a desire to showcase it in some fashion, document one's personal experiences with it, and share the above affection, the Let's Play series and gameplay commentary of SA members were thus often the product of more intrinsic and subjectively diverse motivations. As a result, over the years, rather than being homogeneous in character, they took on a variety of different formats and began to incorporate a wide range of different media forms from animated gifs to audio files accessible via hyperlinks.

Initially driven by predominantly non-commercial intentions, the incarnation of gameplay commentary, which eventually became the most dominant within SA's Let's Play subforums and outside this forum environment, is the video-based Let's Play. As defined earlier, this form of Let's Play involves a series of videos that captured a complete playthrough of a game by a particular player with accompanying commentary delivered via voice-over or text-based subtitles. The Let's Play's serially released video episodes were then ultimately hosted and distributed via online video platforms for other forum members to access and watch for free. While the juxtaposition of audio commentary with video footage of gameplay by players pre-existed its Let's Play counterpart,⁴⁴⁷ as will be further illustrated later in this chapter, Let's Play's now dominant video-based form emerged on January 5th, 2007 when a forum member known by the name “Slowbeef” synched his recorded voice-over commentary with captured gameplay footage in order to create the first episode of a video-based Let's Play series of an emulated Sega Genesis version of *The Immortal* (1990).⁴⁴⁸ In describing his use of audio commentary within

⁴⁴⁷ For instance, in May 2004, James Rolfe, an amateur media creators known by his monikers The Angry Nintendo Nerd and The Angry Video Game Nerd, would produce a video-based review of *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* (1987) that entailed the juxtaposition of edited gameplay footage with over-layed audio commentary riffing on the game and criticizing its flaws. See James Rolfe, "AVGN: Castlevania 2: Simon's Quest," Streaming video, 9:26, posted by "Mike Matei," May 7th, 2004, <http://cinemassacre.com/2004/05/07/castlevania-2-simons-quest/>

⁴⁴⁸ For an account of these origins, see Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "Did I Start Let's Play," *Slowbeef.Tumblr.com*, 30th January 2013, <http://slowbeef.tumblr.com/post/41879526522/did-i-start-lets-play>; Patrick Klepek, "Who Invented Let's Play Videos?," *Kotaku*, June 5th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/who-invented-lets-play-videos-1702390484>

the first episode of this Let's Play series, Slowbeef's commentary reveals that professional DVD film commentaries were one inspiration for this new amateur form of video-based gameplay commentary.⁴⁴⁹ After creating his episodic video content for the series, Slowbeef then provided free access to the produced episodes of his Let's Play by posting updates throughout the following week — updates which contained links to where the episodic videos were located on Google Video — within a SA forum thread dedicated to the series. Increasingly adopting a similar video-based approach to the practice after this early experiment in 2007, other gameplay commentators on SA or Let's Players — who created videos for their own Let's Play series around the same time — would also make them accessible within its forums by hosting them on user-driven, online video and social media platforms like Google Video, Viddler, Blip TV, Dailymotion, Stage6, and Vimeo, which conveniently did not have YouTube's ten minute time limit, nor its initially low video quality. Moreover, although Slowbeef was motivated to complete his Let's Play in roughly a week, other gameplay commentators emerging on the SA forums — driven by their own intrinsic, personal, and often affective motivations — would be similarly compelled to invest varying amounts of time and labour that would invest in the production and completion of their respective Let's Play series, whether they are constructed with textual commentary and screenshots or video and voice-over commentary. Time to completion for a Let's Play could range from one to several weeks, many months, or more than a year depending on the length of the game and the amount of writing, screenshot creation, audiovisual editing, visual effects, forum participation, and collaboration with other players or commentators that is involved.

As already indicated, because this form of gameplay commentary was not primarily motivated by extrinsic goals or the pursuit of profit, the audiovisual style and content of the Let's Plays being created and distributed within the SA Let's Play subforums also differed considerably. For instance, a video episode from a Let's Play series could be represented as an uninterrupted in-game performance or a heavily edited one eliding errors and dead time. It could also feature cutaways to footage representing alternative gameplay choices, secrets, and narrative deviations within a game. Exemplifying some of the creative variety often encountered within the Let's Plays emerging out of this forum environment, SA-based Let's Plays like SA member

⁴⁴⁹ Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "Immortal Level 1 (with commentary)," YouTube video, 9:43, posted by "Slowbeef," April 26th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA1kIBwGhrk>

VoidBurger's 2009 and 2011 playthroughs of the horror game *Silent Hill* (1999) and *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* (2009), respectively, occasionally include various types of audiovisual effects, such as: the manipulation of the captured gameplay footage's speed; the compositing of onscreen subtitles and original imagery within this video content; the insertion of lingering screenshots of informational wikipedia pages defining some of the game's more unfamiliar concepts in-between this video material; and, lastly, the addition of audiovisual references, clips, sounds, and music from other media sources to the captured video.⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, the audio commentary within Let's Play video created by a forum member of SA could be either planned or more spontaneous, delivered live during a gameplay performance or recorded after that performance is digitally captured and then added to the resulting video. The commentary accompanying video-based Let's Plays on SA was often either spoken or communicated through sub-titles that are overlaid over the captured footage. It could be comedic and entertaining in character. Using the game being performatively played and recorded as a platform for the more transformative forms of creativity seen within the previous chapter, the voice-over, subtitled, or text-based commentary of Let's Plays on SA, whether they involved video updates or not, occasionally created an original and often comedic fictional narrative or experience from its various elements. This more transformative incarnation of Let's Play is exemplified by SA member LordMune's 2007 video-based Let's Play of the multi-platform game *Fahrenheit* (2005) wherein he creates subtitled commentary as if from the protagonist Lucas Kane's perspective.⁴⁵¹ It is also represented by fellow SA member Docfuture's use of captured gameplay footage from numerous games within the *Sonic the Hedgehog* franchise in conjunction with composited and edited video material from other live action and animated media sources in order to create a 2007 Let's Play of a non-existent and fictional Sega CD 32X re-release of the popular Sega Genesis game *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* (1992) titled *Sonic 2: Special Edition*.⁴⁵² Frequently driven by their

⁴⁵⁰ To see some of these audiovisual effects, see Voidburger, "Let's Play Silent Hill 09 - School's Out," YouTube video, 12:14, posted by "Voidburger," March 29th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVUGnWVT80>; Voidburger, "Let's Play Silent Hill 10 - Foreshadowing and Killer Monkeys," YouTube video, 11:47, posted by "Voidburger," March 29th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LknKdR6VYas>; Voidburger, "Let's Play Shattered Memories 15 - Tigers and Candy," YouTube video, 23:50, posted by "Voidburger," September 16th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jg4o9KRW2K8>

⁴⁵¹ LordMune, "Fahrenheit," *Let's Play Archive*, accessed September 2nd, 2017, <https://lparchive.org/Fahrenheit/>

⁴⁵² See Docfuture, "Sonic 2 Special Edition: Stage 1 (Emerald Hill Zone)," YouTube video, 3:58, posted by "mikedawson," July 30th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnnVmpSrrak>; Docfuture, "Sonic 2 Special Edition: Stage 2 (Chemical Zone)," YouTube video, 4:36, posted by "mikedawson," July 30th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Diq2CJ71V5s>

affection for the specific game they appropriate and perform, certain commentaries of SA-based Let's Players are not intended to transform or alter the original game in this manner, but, instead, to help represent a skillful, expert, and completionist performance of it and offer insight about it. In addition, other commentaries recorded by SA creators at the same time as a game's captured gameplay were meant to contribute to the preservation of a player's authentic and often affective experiences with a game or of his or her specific performance of it. Lastly, some of the player commentaries contained within Let's Plays distributed on SA were explicitly intended to inform viewers about: the cultural or production context that shaped the game being performed; useful strategies for it; its formal features; its narrative content; its secrets; and its flaws and successes. One example of a Let's Play of a game with such informative commentary within this forum space is a 2008 Let's Play of the PC-based game *Jurassic Park: Trespasser* (1998) created by SA forum member Research Indicates. As it guides the viewer through the game, his commentary provides in-depth information about the game's difficult production context, its situation within the trans-media *Jurassic Park* franchise, and the limitations of its original 3D engine and physics system.⁴⁵³

Even though SA require forum users to pay a 9.95 \$ registration fee in order to post the threads and replies necessary for a Let's Play and its owners financially benefited from the rise of gameplay commentary in popularity on their platform as a result of this fee, if only to cover its hosting costs, this diverse creative activity from SA's gameplay commentators and their production and distribution of the early gameplay commentary videos that made up their Let's Play series were, as already stated, not primarily motivated by a desire to monetize the audience they accumulated and obtain some form of profit. Moreover, in the early years of Let's Play, its practitioners had difficulty monetizing this viewership with the help of ads on the video hosting platforms they chose including earlier versions of YouTube, partially due to their lack of access to these platforms' ad-related monetization features or due to the absence or initially minimal presence of such options within them. Since 2007 and especially after 2012,⁴⁵⁴ YouTube and the

⁴⁵³ ResearchIndicates, "Let's Play Jurassic Park Trespasser Level 1 - The Beach," YouTube video, 17: 29, posted by "ResearchIndicates," November 11th, 2011,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oepl6l6kK0&list=PL0058A651EB882B48&index=3&feature=plpp_video

⁴⁵⁴ On April 12th, 2012, YouTube would open its partnership program to all users living in 20 countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. See "Being a YouTube Creator Just Got Even More Rewarding," *YouTube Creators Blog*, April 12th, 2012, <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2012/04/being-youtube-creator-just-got-even.html>

Multi-Channel Networks emerging on the platform began to expand their once relatively exclusive partnership programs — which enable popular content creators and corporate partners to monetize their content's audience through advertising — and include more average users within them, thus affording them access to these programs' monetization options. However, initially, the productions of Let's Play creators on SA's Let's Play subforum were not particularly driven by a desire to convert their gameplay commentary series into a profit-making means of building a large enough audience for social media platforms to commodify and sell to advertisers. Instead, the productive labour of the Let's Play creators who gathered on this subforum was not substantially motivated by commercial and extrinsic motivations. Instead, it was initially driven by more community-oriented cultural values and a variety of intrinsic motives. It was often the product of Let's Players' frequent affection for the games they appropriated, but also of an equally subjective wish to engage with them more significantly and creatively. Moreover, this labour was also occasionally propelled by the subjective desires of certain Let's Players to share, with other forum members, their affective passion for these games, their knowledge about them as media objects, and the personal and social experiences they captured while recording and producing the resulting Let's Play series. Eventually, the partially affective and emotional relationship of Let's Players for the games they choose to perform would even expand and develop into an affection for the often highly creative Let's Play series that would result from their productive and extensive labour. Reflecting this growing affective attachment to their own work and the more communal values occasionally emerging within SA's forums, in February 2007, From Earth, a member of SA's Games subforum, would create an online archive entitled the Let's Play Archive with the voluntary help of other forum participants in order to collect, preserve, and make freely accessible the time-consuming and labour-intensive Let's Play series created by the community of creators within the threads of Something Awful's Let's Play subforum — partly in anticipation of their inevitable future within SA's own forum archives, a locked space only accessible to the site's forum members who pay for access to it.⁴⁵⁵ As it changed domain names and eventually came to be managed by fellow SA forum member and early Let's Play Archive volunteer Baldurk, this constantly changing platform would attempt to archive these Let's Plays — in a somewhat altered form distinct from their initial incarnation

⁴⁵⁵ Baldurk, "The History of the Let's Play Archive," *Let's Play Archive*, accessed June 28th, 2016, <http://lparchive.org/history>

within a forum environment — by preserving their textual commentary, their screenshots, and their hyperlinks to relevant audiovisual content including the video-based Let's Play episodes which are often still hosted elsewhere. In order to render more accessible the Let's Play Archive's linked video content and episodes for some of the more prominent video-based Let's Plays from Something Awful and preserve it on online platforms less subject to constant change and abandonment, links were provided within this archive to allow users to locate and download such videos on an alternative JW Player-supported hosting platform named Baldurdash, which was created by SA subforum member Baldurk, and within a Let's Play collection within the non-profit online repository The Internet Archive following a partnership with its managers. Thus, a combination of communal and more intrinsic motivations was the driving force behind the initial impulse of the members of SA's Let's Play subforum to create, protect, and circulate the varying forms of gameplay commentary, whether video-based or not, within this residual online forum environment, but also beyond it on various user-driven and Web 2.0-based social media platforms as well as on these alternative Web-based archival spaces.

Why do Gamers Create and Spectate Gameplay Commentary Videos?

As illustrated in the previous paragraph by the creation of the Let's Play Archive and the free access it provided to the screenshot and video-based Let's Play series, gameplay commentators from 2005 onwards — contemporaneously with their growing integration of their video-based work within the monetization systems and networks of social media platforms like YouTube — often create and distribute Let's Plays and commentary videos for non-commercial reasons that are more intrinsic in character. For instance, by preserving gameplay interactions captured in real-time, sharing them as digital videos on various online media platforms, and altering the original meaning of a game through commentary, gameplay commentary videos allow players to leave their personal imprint on the appropriated game and the captured footage, thus affording them a greater sense of ownership over it. Echoing Catherine Grant's argument in relation to DVD film commentaries,⁴⁵⁶ the overlaying of personal commentary onto gameplay, whether through text or audio, similarly produced a transformative “aural 'rewriting'” of a game that deviates from the homogeneous meanings partially constructed about it by the marketing discourse of its publisher. In his 2013 book analyzing narrative and agency within digital games,

⁴⁵⁶ Catherine Grant, “Auteur Machines? Auteursism and the DVD,” in *Film and Television After DVD*, eds. James Bennett and Tom Brown (New York: Routledge, 2008), 104.

Sebastian Domsch similarly acknowledges Let's Plays' transformation of the games they appropriate into an original text, stating that the player's commentary results in "both a self-reflexive analysis of the game as game and fiction and turns into its own narrative of a person playing a game."⁴⁵⁷ Exemplifying how commentators can engage in such a critical analysis of a game's fiction and interrogate its intended representational meaning, the second episode of SA commentator Geop's informative 2011 Let's Play series of *Assassin's Creed 2* (2009) contains a well-researched, documentary-like sequence with voice-over commentary that openly criticizes the authenticity of the game's representation of the non-playable character (NPC), the plague doctor, within the game's historical setting: 15th century Renaissance Italy.⁴⁵⁸ Likewise, in their own comedic 2009 Let's Play of the third-person action shooter *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand* (2009) starring the rap artist Curtis Jackson, SA commentators Chip Cheezum and General Ironicus drastically alter the game's meaning through their subversive commentary. For instance, during the eight episode of the series, General Ironicus quotes Douglas Massey's 1993 book *American Apartheid: The Segregation and the Making of an Underclass* — specifically, a chapter on the language of segregation — in order to provide context for the style of language occasionally adopted by the game's protagonists and foreground the systemic social structures of racial oppression that shape, isolate, and stigmatize what Massey calls 'Black English vernacular' despite it possessing its own unique complexity, richness, and independent history.⁴⁵⁹ This intervention functions as a corrective against the possibility of white gamers perceiving the language used by the game's protagonists as a 'perversion' of so-called standard English or ignorantly appropriating it without being aware of the systemic power relations that shape its cultural representation and marginalize it. Exemplifying a transformative approach similar to Docfuture's *Sonic 2: Special Edition* Let's Play, SA Let's Player TieTuesday would even use the Let's Play format and various forms of audiovisual manipulation and editing to construct a video playthrough of a restored fictional "Special Edition" of the game *Super Godzilla* (1993) for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System that the Let's Play's lead commentator claim to have

⁴⁵⁷ Sebastian Domsch, *Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 50.

⁴⁵⁸ Geop, "Assassin's Creed 2 – 02," youtube video, 45:26, posted by "geopl," July 23rd, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btcggi6awgw&index=2&list=PLA76D0E2BE0E9D584>

⁴⁵⁹ Chip Cheezum and General Ironicus, "50 cent: Blood on the Sand # 8: The Wrong Day to Bring Guns," YouTube video, 18:30, posted on "Chip and General Ironicus Let's Plays," August 27th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGVaR5IUEdk>

created.⁴⁶⁰ While radically altering the meaning of the appropriated game, this transformative form of gameplay commentary also deliberately undercuts the sense of unmediated authenticity often pursued by certain gameplay commentators and foregrounds the constructed mediated character of any player-created representation of a game. All of these examples illustrate the transformative potential of gameplay commentary videos to change how a viewer experiences the appropriated games and allow commentators to leave a tangible mark on them through such radical alterations and then obtain a greater sense of ownership over the final creative product. This very potential for greater creativity and proximity to the games they appropriate is also another factor that attracts gameplay commentators — some of which have grown to acquire strong affective relationship with these games, gaming itself, or a participatory practice like Let's Play — into devoting a considerable amount of creative labour and time when it comes to their production and their online distribution on social media platforms.

Aside from providing a platform for this type for transformative creativity, gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays and their spectatorship are also driven by more communal and social motivations. For instance, Something Awful's Gaming subforums became a space that allowed gameplay commentators like Research Indicates to acquire a certain amount of attention and subcultural capital for the knowledge about a game or the skills displayed in their Let's Play series, whether they relate to the performance of the game itself or the production quality, technical mastery, aesthetic originality, and commentary present within a Let's Play. In a sense, by sharing this content on platforms like SA and YouTube, commentators could accumulate what Mia Consalvo, in another context, has termed “gaming capital.”⁴⁶¹ Thus, within SA's gaming subforums and outside it, the acquisition of this cultural capital and the heightened form of status and attention that accompanies it functions as a potentially powerful motivation for online users to create and distribute gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays. Aside from pursuing this type of cultural capital through gameplay commentary, Slowbeef himself and writer Kris Ligman through his interviews with Let's Players from SA indicated that early commentators were heavily motivated to create Let's Plays due to the social dimension of playing a game together

⁴⁶⁰ TieTuesday, "Let's Play Super Godzilla: Special Edition - 1," YouTube video, 13:49, posted by "Tietuesday Stream Archives," April 11th, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tb3ElugexOw&list=PLNG-p83v4xrH3LvV0wNTcpJ-XqpIGEiqS>

⁴⁶¹ Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 84, 89-91, 97.

and the desire to share one's experience with a game with others.⁴⁶² During the early years of Let's Play, this social desire was strengthened by SA's partially communal forum environment and the Let's Plays emerging within it often contributed to the highly attractive feeling of vicarious participation that tended to accompany private and public performances of a game involving a spectating bystander or a crowd of them. Extending this social dimension to gameplay spectatorship itself, Henry Jenkins and T.L. Taylor have even noted that this affective and embodied sensation of vicarious participation can be evoked by simply watching the gameplay of another player.⁴⁶³ Moreover, in an article co-written with Emma Witkowski, Taylor has also specifically stated that gameplay spectatorship can “viscerally pull you into that play moment, sometimes even transforming it into a kind of shared experience.”⁴⁶⁴ As will be argued later in this chapter, key factors that would compel game companies to incorporate gameplay commentary videos within their promotional strategies are the desire of gameplay commentators to share their experiences with the game they are playing — affective or not, positive or negative — with others and the potential of the resulting videos to contagiously transmit positive feelings about a game to the audience of their social media content as well as to evoke the affectively pleasurable sense of vicarious participation described above within them.

Supporting the above vision of the social and communal dimension of gameplay commentary and its spectatorship, the gameplay commentator and Let's Player General Ironicus — a significant contributor to SA's Let's Play community — has claimed that the creation and spectatorship of Let's Plays is “about making a social connection, and sharing what was meant to be a solo experience” while stating that it is also about forming a “community, a platform for interaction.”⁴⁶⁵ Outside of SA on YouTube, commentator Zack Scott expresses a similar motive for creating gameplay commentary videos when he professes his love of “sharing my experience

⁴⁶² Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), “Did I Start Let's Play,” *Slowbeef.Tumblr.com*, 30th January 2013, <http://slowbeef.tumblr.com/post/41879526522/did-i-start-lets-play>; Kris Ligman, “Let's Play Super Rutgers RPG: Interactivity by Proxy in an Online Gaming Culture,” (lecture, Game Behind the Video Game, Rutgers School of Communications, April 9th, 2011), 2-3, 12, <http://direcritic.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/kris-ligman-lets-play-super-rutgers-rpg.pdf>.

⁴⁶³ Henry Jenkins, *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (New York University Press, 2007), 34; T.L. Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), 186.

⁴⁶⁴ T.L. Taylor and Emma Witkowski, “This is How We Play it: What a Mega-LAN Can Teach Us About Games,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, ed. Yusuf Pisan (Monterey, CA: ACM Press, 2010), 198.

⁴⁶⁵ General Ironicus, “The Great Lesson of Let's Play,” *Tumblr*, September 10th, 2012, <http://chip-and-ironicus.tumblr.com/post/31305800765/the-great-lesson-of-lets-play>

with Nintendo games with you guys” in one of his user videos.⁴⁶⁶ Within such videos and Let's Plays, this sensation of a shared experience is often reinforced through the use of inclusive, first-person, plural personal pronouns within the voice-over commentary of their creators as well as through other forms of viewer interaction within a video or within a comment section or a forum thread as would often happen on YouTube and SA. Many incarnations of gameplay commentary cultivate a similar experience within spectators by adopting a less planned and more real-time and unscripted form of commentary that coincides with the recorded gameplay performance of the player or by choosing to play a game with which a commentator has little to no experience or familiarity. While present within SA Let's Plays, this style of unprepared commentary in conjunction with the appropriation of an unfamiliar game would come to be more popular among gameplay commentators and Let's Players native to YouTube. Moreover, its real-time character gives spectators the pleasurable sensation that they are simultaneously experiencing the authentic spontaneous reactions of the performing commentator. Similarly, the live-streaming of gameplay commentary content on platforms like YouTube, Twitch, and Hitbox — which is now named Smashcast — has increased this sense of proximity between their separate experiences. From its inception to the present, gameplay commentary was thus a highly attractive creative practice for online users who were also gamers because it enabled them to capture and publicly share what were once private ephemeral experiences and connect with other connected individuals. These online users, for their part, were also compelled to watch gameplay commentary videos because they provided them with the appealing opportunity to vicariously share these experiences with a commentator and feel as though they are playing alongside him or her. Moreover, the partly affect-driven desire of gameplay commentators to showcase and share games and gameplay experiences with other individuals with the help of entertaining and informative commentary is thus a core motivation driving the creation and distribution of gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays. On their podcast Retsutalk, Let's Players Slowbeef and Diabetus along with fellow gameplay commentator ProtonJon speak to the similar motivation and love that initially compelled SA creators to produce a Let's Play:

Diabetus: “Isn't it crazy that we're having this conversation....I mean seriously, remember when Let's Play started taking off say on Something Awful back in 2006, 2007 [...] It was

⁴⁶⁶ Zack Scott, "Thoughts on Nintendo Claiming Let's Plays (Vlog)," YouTube video, 10:05, posted by "ZackScottGames," May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcdFfNzJfB4>

about 'This game is fun. I want to show it off. Let's have a community discussion about it.'”

[...]

ProtonJon: “It's all about the love of the game, which is the reason why we all started doing this in the first place.”

Slowbeef: “The whole point of Let's Play when it started and when it kept going, was just like this notion of 'Hey, you know what, here's this game you might not have seen, here's something you might not be familiar with, I'm helping promote it.’”⁴⁶⁷

Although, during its beginnings, Let's Plays of games were not yet fully integrated within the attention economy of social media platforms or as publicly visible as they would later become, Slowbeef's remarks reveal an awareness of how gameplay commentary and Let's Play, whether they involve digital video or not, were always connected to the commercial object they appropriate and hence functioned as a indirect form of promotion for games — a potential that the game industry would soon realize and encourage. Ultimately, informed by a combination of affective predispositions and conscious intentions, the complicated motivations compelling the practitioners of gameplay commentary to produce their videos and Let's Play series are a diverse and contingent product of their heterogeneous subjectivities. As suggested in the prior paragraphs, they can range from a desire to share their love of a game or their unique gameplay experiences and a wish to enlighten others about a game's content and production to an interest in cultivating a community of gamers around a game, commentary videos, or a Let's Play itself.

As for the motivations driving online users to view and consume gameplay commentary videos and let's Plays, they are also similarly varied. For instance, critic Ben Croshaw claims to watch Let's Plays because they deliver additional information about a game from a supposedly more authentic and less biased and mediated perspective than from within the industry and they can draw attention to games, especially lesser known titles, and their interesting qualities.⁴⁶⁸

Embodying a motivation that is less beneficial to the game industry, an SA forum member with the username John Liver, within a forum thread discussing Let's Play as a practice, would reveal

⁴⁶⁷ Slowbeef, Diabetus, and ProtonJon. “Retsutalk 24: Nintend'oh!,” May 19th, 2013, in *Retsutalk*, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:12:49, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://retsupurae.libsyn.com/24-nintend-oh>

⁴⁶⁸ Ben Croshaw, “Let's Talk About Let's Play,” *The Escapist*, March 8th, 2011, <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/video-games/columns/extra-punctuation/8703-Let-s-Talk-About-Let-s-Play.2>

that he occasionally consumes the gameplay commentary videos of a Let's Play because he could not afford to purchase the game being performed or the console on which it runs.⁴⁶⁹ Conversely, moving away from the game being the main attraction to the commentator, another SA forum contributor named Medieval Medic has claimed that he or she watches this content "to see another person's perspective on a game I have already played, and also because I find a LPer humorous."⁴⁷⁰ Further echoing this different emphasis, gameplay commentator and critic John Bain, also known by his online alias Totalbiscuit, has argued that viewers watch this content in order to witness the commentator themselves: participate in the shared hobby of gaming; express him or herself within a game; and display their gameplay experiences, game knowledge, humor, or engaging personality.

Ultimately, the motivations compelling individuals to create and watch gameplay commentary vary considerably and, when it came to gameplay commentators and Let's Players, they were often non-commercial, intrinsic, and social in nature. However, once the production of gameplay commentary videos began to offer financial benefits to the creators who eventually chose to distribute them on social media platforms with a larger audience and improving video quality like YouTube, these motives started to intersect with other more extrinsic, individualistic, and profit-oriented goals including the acquisition of greater revenue, celebrity and monetizable attention from the practice and the financial form of empowerment that would accompany it. As seen in previous chapter, this pursuit of creative empowerment by amateur creators, financial or otherwise, was strongly encouraged and afforded by YouTube and its Web 2.0 discourse which frames it as an empowering and playful alternative for average citizens to the distribution-related gatekeeping and restrictions associated with traditional mass media industries. Due to the platform's attractively large number of viewers and its visible affordance, encouragement, and inclusion of a lot of user-driven creative activity through its open-ended and partly automated architecture and its idealistic rhetoric of amateur empowerment, most gameplay commentary videos are now hosted on YouTube by commentators and Let's Players who are increasingly seeking to convert their hobby into a profitable practice. Importantly, as will be demonstrated

⁴⁶⁹ John Liver, comment on "State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 7th, 2012,

<http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>

⁴⁷⁰ Medieval Medic, comment on "State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 7th, 2012,

<http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>

later in this chapter, the successful achievement of this goal often necessitated the production of a larger quantity of popular media content YouTube, but also the cultivation of a substantive affective connection between viewers and the expressive personalities of commentators. It is these very strong affective ties between commentators and their fans that YouTube, MCNs, and game companies would attempt to channel for profit and promotion using an apparatus of discursive and non-discursive strategies that would come to embody the new paradigm of flexible control supporting this twenty first century online media ecosystem and the communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism driving it. While gameplay commentators increasingly began to financially benefit from the practice's growing integration within the monetization strategies of social media platforms like YouTube and the corporate entities connected to them, this chapter will later reveal the constraints, forms of inequality, and exploitation that they still experience on the platform and which significantly undercut the more utopian Web 2.0 discourse of empowerment strategically adopted by Google's platform.

Gameplay Commentary and its Place Within a Shared Media Ecology

However, despite the sudden rise to popularity of gameplay commentary videos from 2007 onwards on Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, the juxtaposition of vocal commentary with game footage has a long history prior to its arrival within Something Awful's Games and Let's Play subforum and was indebted to a wide array of pre-existing media practices. As suggested by Slowbeef, his initial decision to use audio commentary with video for a Let's Play series was influenced by DVD film commentaries. In addition, the televised form of film riffing popularized by the cult television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988-1999) was another precursor to this use of voice-over commentary in conjunction with appropriated footage of media content. More importantly, however, from the early 2000s onwards, DVD-like audio commentaries produced by game developers were also included within games like Factor 5's *Star Wars Episode 1: Battle for Naboo* (2000) and anticipated this player-produced form of video-based gameplay commentary.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷¹ "Naboo's DVD-like Experience," *IGN*, January 8th, 2001, accessed March 29th, 2015, <http://ca.ign.com/articles/2001/01/09/naboos-dvd-like-experience>; For a more extensive history of this professional form of in-game commentary, see Felan Parker, "Play-By-Play: Audio Commentary in Digital Games," in *TEM 2012: Proceedings of the Technology and Emerging Media Track – Annual Conference of the Canadian Communication Association*, edited by G. Latsko-Toth and F. Millerand (Waterloo, May 30th-June 1st 2012), http://www.tem.fl.ulaval.ca/www/wp-content/PDF/Waterloo_2012/PARKER-TEM2012.pdf

Other precursors of gameplay commentary videos existed in the 1980s and 1990s and included VHS tapes and DVDs of recorded gameplay that often featured highly skilled performances and informative commentary. For instance, as noted in a piece by *Polygon* writer Tracey Lien, some of these tapes or DVDs, particularly combo videos circulating within the fighting game community, originated in Japan in the 1990s and copies were eventually acquired by competitive Western players overseas.⁴⁷² Other similar videos with gameplay commentary were more profit-driven and designed to promote the release of new gaming commodities. For instance, the American video game magazine, *Game Player*, had a VHS series beginning in 1989 that featured recorded and edited gameplay footage in conjunction with instructional voice-over commentary about a selection of games for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) console.⁴⁷³ These gameplay commentary videos by the enthusiast press promoted new game releases marketed by companies and incentivized the purchase of magazine subscriptions. Similarly, tapes that featured gameplay synchronized with promotional voice-over commentary were often created by companies like Nintendo and in partnership with game retailers and other corporate brands while often being distributed to the subscribers of related gaming magazines like *Nintendo Power*.⁴⁷⁴ These informative gameplay commentary tapes were often produced by third party video production companies for profit and, in some instances, licensed by game publishers.⁴⁷⁵ This combination of recorded gameplay with informative and promotional audio

⁴⁷² Tracey Lien, "When Watching Beats Playing," *Polygon*, March 17th, 2014,

<http://www.polygon.com/features/2014/3/17/5491040/twitch-when-watching-beats-playing>

⁴⁷³ For an example of such tapes, see *Game Player's GameTape for Nintendo Cartridges Vol. 1. No. 1*, (Signal/ABC Video Production, 1988), Videocassette [VHS], 44 min.

⁴⁷⁴ Examples of these tapes include the promotional Nintendo VHS tapes released by Nintendo Power and retailer Toys'R'Us and the tapes produced by Sega occasionally with the help of corporate partners like Howard Johnson hotels and Lunchables: *Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, (Redmond, WA: Nintendo of America, 2000), Videocassette [VHS], 4 min; *Banjo Kazooie*, (Redmond, WA: Nintendo of America, 1998), Videocassette [VHS], 10 min; *The Invasion of Nintendo*, (Redmond, WA: Nintendo of America, 1995), Videocassette [VHS], 15 min ; *Eternal Champions: Strategy Video*, (Hayward, CA: Sega, 1994), Videocassette [VHS], 22 min; *Sega Game Gear Game Tips: Volume 1*, (Sega/Howard Johnson Hotels, 1995), Videocassette [VHS], 15 min; *Sega Game Tips Video*, (Oscar Meyer Foods Corporation/Sega, 1995), Videocassette [VHS], 8 min; *Street Fighter 2: Turbo*, (Long Beach, CA: Golian Castro Productions, 1993), Videocassette [VHS], 7 min.

⁴⁷⁵ Other examples of such tapes produced by third parties include the VHS tapes produced by MPI Home Video seeking to attract the attention of competitive gamers, VHS tapes created by Vestron Video seeking to inform players with tips on how to beat a limited sample of Atari games, or the tapes created by Golian Castro Productions and licenced by Capcom promoting the Street Fighter franchise: *How to Beat Home Video Games Volume I: The Best Games*, (Stamford, Connecticut: Vestron Video, 1982), Videocassette [VHS], 60 min; *Secret Video Game Tricks, Codes & Strategies Vol. 1*, (MPI Home Video/EG Video, 1989), Videocassette [VHS], 59 min; *Street Fighter 2: Mastering Great Combinations and Strategies*, (Long Beach, CA: Golian Castro Productions, 1993), Videocassette [VHS], 46 min.

commentary was also found within gaming-centered television shows in the early 1990s like *Video Power* (1990-1992) and *Game Pro TV* (1991-1992). Thus, the original incarnations of video-based gameplay commentary often had a promotional and profit-driven function for corporations within the digital games industry. As will be argued later in this chapter, the player-created version of this practice now dominant on social media platforms like YouTube has become increasingly integrated within the marketing strategies of game companies and have, in a sense, come full circle back to these origins.

Following and echoing the host commentary about the gameplay performances of competing players occasionally found within emerging television programs from the 1980s onwards that focused on arcade and console games and featured segments involving gaming competitions between contestants — programs like *Starcade* (1982-1984) — the video-based form of gameplay commentary described in the previous paragraph would also re-appear during the 1990s and early 2000s within the emerging e-sports scene, which began to rely on the sharing of captured gameplay in which "shoutcasters" gave play-by-play commentary of gaming matches and offered relevant information to spectators. As noted by Taylor and other e-sports veterans, commentators in this field overlaid their commentary onto recorded matches, occasionally as a means to provide feedback for players, or they streamed their audio using a Shoutcast plug-in for the Winamp software.⁴⁷⁶ Complementing this growing fusion of player-produced voice-over and captured gameplay was the creative practice of machinima, which Matt Kelland, Dave Morris, and Dave Lloyd have defined as “the art of making animated films within a realtime virtual 3D environment.”⁴⁷⁷ According to Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche, machinima was shaped by the demoscene of the late 1970s and the competitive gaming scene of the mid-to-late 1990s and initially appeared in the form of 'demo' files that were composed of mostly first person shooter gameplay and shared on online networks.⁴⁷⁸ This creative mode of movie-making with game

⁴⁷⁶ See Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*, 225; “Talking a Good Game: Game Commentators on What It Takes to Win E-Sports,” *Edge*, May 15th 2014, accessed Sept. 19th, 2014, <http://www.edge-online.com/features/talking-a-good-game-game-commentators-on-what-it-takes-to-cover-esports/> [site discontinued]; Alex Rubens, “Marcus 'djWheat' Graham: E-sports, the Streaming Boom, and the Future of Entertainment,” *GankReport*, May 30th, 2013, accessed Sept. 19th, 2014, <http://gankreport.com/marcus-djwheat-graham-esports-the-streaming-boom-and-the-future-of-entertainment/>

⁴⁷⁷ Matt Kelland, Dave Morris, and Dave Lloyd, *Machinima: Making Animated Movies in 3D Virtual Environments*, (Boston, MA: Thomson Course Technology PTR, 2005), 10.

⁴⁷⁸ See Michael Nitsche, “Machinima as Media,” *The Machinima Reader*, eds. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 118-119; Henry Lowood, “Video Capture: Machinima, Documentation, and the History of Virtual Worlds,” *The Machinima Reader*, eds. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge,

assets encouraged the use of voice acting to create an original fictional narrative and the practice grew in popularity in the 2000s following its adoption of more mobile video formats for online distribution. Several machinima works like Jim Munroe's commentated travelogue *My Trip to Liberty* (2004) using the game *Grand Theft Auto 3* (2001) even exemplified the juxtaposition of player-captured gameplay and audio commentary that would eventually appear within gameplay commentary videos.⁴⁷⁹ Similarly, Ross Scott's machinima series *Freeman's Mind* (2007) was effectively a complete Let's Play of the PC game *Half Life* (1998) that used use audio commentary to create a fictional narrative told from the perspective of the protagonist Gordon Freeman.⁴⁸⁰ Contemporaneous with the growing popularity of various forms of gameplay capture within e-sports and competitive gaming, online machinima videos' predominant use of voice-over to create the original dialogue and commentary for the characters and avatars of the digital game environments they appropriated was thus another important influence on the video-based practices of gameplay commentary and Let's Play, which grew in visibility at the same time during the second half of the twenty first century's first decade.

Gameplay Commentary and the Multiple Forms of Player Experience

In light of the relationships and parallels that gameplay commentary as a practice has with other media forms in print, video, television, and the internet and in order to fully grasp its unique qualities and parallels with them, it is necessary to recognize that, as suggested elsewhere by Antoni Roig and his co-authors, digital games exist within a shared media ecology where residual and emerging media forms have an effect on them, on how players interact with them, and on how they are discussed within popular culture and media scholarship.⁴⁸¹ For example, according to Nitsche, early console games and the attract mode of arcade cabinets reflected this relationship to other media, particularly cinema, from the 1980s onwards through their use of non-interactive, animated and cinematic sequences.⁴⁸² This trend would even become more pervasive within later CD and DVD-based games. It was due to these types of parallels between

Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 6-9.

⁴⁷⁹ "My Trip to Liberty City," YouTube video, 7:34, posted by "nomediakings," March 18th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxpDHiH5PKk>

⁴⁸⁰ "Freeman's Mind – Episode 1 (Half-Life Machinima)," YouTube video, 6:08, posted by "Machinima," Dec. 3rd, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7J80KD4BG7M>

⁴⁸¹ For an example of this approach, see Antoni Roig et al., "Videogame as Media Practice: An Exploration of the Intersections Between Play and Audiovisual Culture," *Convergence* 15, no.1 (2009): 89-103, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856508097019>.

⁴⁸² Nitsche, "Machinima as Media," 120.

media that, when media and game studies scholars like Lev Manovich or Alexander Galloway analyze games, they often compare some of their features to cinematic aesthetics and texts or analyze them using the terminology of film theory.⁴⁸³ Conversely, seeing such comparisons to other media forms and following in the footsteps of Espen Aarseth's concept of ergodic literature and Jesper Juul's earlier work on game narratives,⁴⁸⁴ Markku Eskelinen differentiated games from more traditional media on the basis that they require configurative input and lack an "audience," a group that he implicitly frames as passive.⁴⁸⁵ However, this understanding of the medium specificity of digital games over-emphasizes the importance of interactivity. Following the misguided early debate within game studies between the proponents of a formalist and ludological approach to game analysis and scholars and narratologists who were examining the medium in terms of its narrative storytelling elements,⁴⁸⁶ an increasing amount of scholars in the field started to problematize this rather reductive conception of video game interactivity. For instance, scholars and writers like James Newman, T.L. Taylor, Kris Ligman, Bart Simon, Holin Lin, and Chuen Tsai-Sun from the early 2000s onwards have all extended the analysis of player practices beyond their interaction with a game to include site-specific and less directly interactive forms of player engagement. As detailed in this scholarship, non-interactive game spectatorship has always been present within gaming sites like arcades, LAN parties, e-sports competitions, and domestic homes.⁴⁸⁷ For instance, the promotional VHS tapes described earlier

⁴⁸³ For examples of this scholarly analysis of games in light of cinema within the field of media studies, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 83-86; Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 39-69; David Bolter and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000), 89-99; Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, "Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces," in *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, eds. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 2-3; Mark P. Wolf, *The Medium of the Video Game* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 53-70, 82-85; and Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces: Image, Play and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 69-127.

⁴⁸⁴ Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1997); Jesper Juul, "Games Telling Stories: A Brief Note on Games and Narrative," *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Games Research* 1, no. 1 (July 2001), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/>

⁴⁸⁵ Markku Eskelinen, "The Gaming Situation," *Game Studies: International Journal of Computer Game Research* 1, no. 1. (July 2001), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/>

⁴⁸⁶ Frasca, Gonzalo. "Ludologists love Stories, Too: Notes from a Debate that Never Took Place," in *Proceedings of the International Digital Games Research Association Conference*, eds. Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2003), 92-99.

⁴⁸⁷ For academic texts engaging with this social form of game spectatorship, see James Newman, "In Search of the Videogame Player: The Lives of Mario," *New Media and Society* 4, no. 3 (2002): 405-422, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146144480200400305>; T.L. Taylor, "Pushing the Borders: Player Participation and Game Culture," *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture*, edited by Joe Karaganis, (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007), 113-114; Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: e-sports and the professionalization of computer*

as well as digital games infused with cinematic cut-scenes draw on media forms separate from the medium of games and tap into the various pleasures provided by game spectatorship. Likewise, machinima, demo files, and gameplay commentaries in the burgeoning e-sports scene revealed how players were attracted to more than the interactive quality of gameplay. Thus, ludology's privileging of the supposedly medium specific quality of video game interactivity misrepresents the vast spectrum of experiences that a player can have with games, none of which have ever been exclusively interactive or purely passive. A similarly exaggerated image of the digital interactivity and participation afforded to online users by social media platforms is embedded within the more utopian incarnation of Web 2.0 discourse reproduced by YouTube despite the significant amount of less interactive spectatorship present within it. For this reason, this chapter will later highlight the important role of game-related spectatorship and the type of relationships gameplay commentators cultivate with their less participatory viewers within the attention economy being cultivated by Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube and by which contemporary manifestations of gameplay commentary and Let's Plays are increasingly shaped.

Gameplay commentary videos or livestreams have interested many media corporations precisely as a result of their very ability to transform once ephemeral and private gameplay experiences into more static and mobile pieces of media which can be distributed on public social media platforms like YouTube and accrue a substantially large enough audience of spectators. Once this audience is acquired by gameplay commentators, they can be commodified by these corporations through several strategies as well as more easily targeted by their promotional strategies seeking to affectively and consciously influence the users of platforms like YouTube into purchasing a specific game title. Acknowledging gameplay commentary videos' transformation of player performances into this more productive static form, Domsch characterizes Let's Plays as "the fixed representation of the performance of a game, a complete linearization of its potential multi-linearity."⁴⁸⁸ Once transformed into this linear form that can be more easily consumed by an attentive audience of passionate gamers on YouTube, gameplay

gaming, 181-238; Taylor and Witkowski, "This is How We Play it: What a Mega-LAN Can Teach Us About Games," 196-198; Kris Ligman, "Watching the Game: Video Games as a Function of Performance and Spectatorship," *dichtung-digital*, February 2008, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2008/2/Ligman.htm>; Holin Lin and Chuen-Tsai Sun, "The Role of Onlookers in Arcade Gaming: Frame Analysis of Public Behaviours," *Convergence* 17, no. 2. (2011): 125-137.; and Bart Simon, "Never Playing Alone: The Social Contextures of Digital Gaming," *Loading...* 1, no. 1 (2007), <http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/viewFile/20/3>.

⁴⁸⁸ Domsch, *Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games*, 49-50.

commentary videos were seen by game companies, MCNs, and platform owners as ideal vehicles for advertising and as media objects whose fannish audience could be commodified and monetized for profit. In her work on YouTube, van Dijck highlights how, in spite of Web 2.0 discourses foregrounding the alternative and participatory character of social media platforms, the majority of its users like the fans of gameplay commentary passively consume the site's ad-supported and increasingly professional content in a manner akin to a television audience.⁴⁸⁹ Despite his more optimistic view of Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube for supposedly affording a greater amount of creative participatory activity than more traditional media forms, even Gauntlett would remark that:

YouTube is in a sense an odd illustration of the anti-television, hands-on, making-things-principle, since it is about people making and sharing *video clips*, and so although it may involve all kinds of creative activity at the *production* stage, what you *consume* is essentially just more television-y stuff.⁴⁹⁰

As this chapter will demonstrate, due to the predominantly passive consumption of game-related content they often cultivate and the indirect promotion of game properties that would result from this almost televisual spectatorship, gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays on YouTube eventually came to resemble their television-bound VHS precursors, which were intended to profit game companies and magazine publishers and to draw the attention of a similarly receptive audience of gaming fans to their products. Like these earlier incarnations of video-based gameplay commentary, their eventual social media counterparts became deeply integrated within the monetization and promotional strategies of the game industry.

Online Platforms for Gameplay Commentary and their Influence

However, before analyzing the close capitalistic relationships that would emerge between the amateur creators of gameplay commentary videos and several entities within the media industry including the owners of social media platforms like YouTube, it is necessary to compare how the environment, rules, and values of Something Awful's Let's Play subforum initially shaped gameplay commentary and how this influence differs from the neoliberal capitalistic influence of the distinctive architectural choices, rules, and expressed values and discourse of Google's platform and the MCNs inhabiting it. Part of the larger apparatus of flexible control

⁴⁸⁹ Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 115-120.

⁴⁹⁰ Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting*, 108.

emerging within the twenty first century's user-driven online media ecosystem, this network of interrelated elements will be demonstrated to compel gameplay commentators and Let's Players into changing various aspects of their video-based practice in order to increase the revenue they obtain by monetizing their content with ads, commodifying their viewership, and receiving monetary donations from their fans. It will also be shown to influence them into voluntarily entering into purportedly collaborative and empowering relationships with Google, gaming-related MCNs, and game companies with the goal of accumulating even more revenue from what was once a less profit-driven practice and hobby.

Parallel to this increasing integration of productive users like gameplay commentators and their labour within the monetization and promotional strategies of the various corporations and social media platform owners currently occupying this online media ecosystem and their growing exposure to the numerous constraints that would follow this transition within this environment, the creative agency of the earlier and contemporaneous gameplay commentators who participated within the gaming-related forum environment of the Something Awful website would be shaped by the different tactics and rules of its moderators. For instance, in the years following the emergence of Let's Play as a practice on SA, forum members and potential Let's Players were explicitly encouraged to discuss existing Let's Plays within a longstanding thread titled The Let's Play Sandcastle where they were also afforded the opportunity to consult a variety of linked resources and a FAQ section intended to facilitate and improve the production of new Let's Plays. More importantly, from the past to the present, the Sandcastle thread has encouraged inexperienced and experienced Let's Players to create test posts for their Let's Play series in order to receive feedback on their work before launching their own forum thread for their series.⁴⁹¹ Within the subforum's "LP Rules Thread," several specific rules also influenced

⁴⁹¹ Slowbeef, comment posted on "The Let's Play Sandcastle (General Discussion)," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on April 13th, 2007, last modified on Decemer 17th, 2007, accessed August 3rd, 2017, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2428257>; baldurk, comment posted on "The Let's Play Sandcastle (FAQ, Test post, gen discussion) - Interest check = Ban," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 25th, 2008, last modified on July 12th, 2010, accessed August 3rd, 2017, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2993270>; Baldurk, comment posted on ""The Let's Play Sandcastle (Ivory Tower Egghead HQ) - Interest Check= Ban," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on January 16th, 2011, accessed August 3rd, 2017, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3381923>; Geop, comment posted on "The Sandcastle [LP Discussion/Test Posts. LP Archiving info added to OP," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on March 24th, 2015, last modified on February 1st, 2016, accessed October 5th, 2017, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3708423>

the form and content of Let's Plays on SA after 2007. For instance, one early rule restricted potential Let's Players from creating Let's Plays of games that are not older than three months—a change from a pre-existing six month rule.⁴⁹² According to Let's Players Slowbeef and Geop, both of whom were moderators for the subforum, this limit was designed to prevent spoilers for contemporary players of a newly released game, compel potential creators to take more time to produce a higher quality Let's Play series at a pace not constrained by a game's commercial release date, and, lastly, avoid rushed Let's Play productions immediately following that date which naturally would tend to be of lower quality.⁴⁹³ Since March 2014, however, this time limit has been removed to accommodate Let's Plays of more recent releases.⁴⁹⁴ Similarly influencing the form that the practice would take, the Let's Play Sandcastle has long provided forum members and potential Let's Players with a Master List of all completed and ongoing Let's Plays and, in a later incarnation of the Sandcastle, explicitly asked to strongly “consider how your LP is going to be different or similar to the previous one” before starting it.⁴⁹⁵ By rendering such a Master List publicly available to forum members and offering these types of suggestions, SA's Let's Play Sandcastle incentivized its gameplay commentators and Let's Players to choose a more diverse range of games for their series. In contrast, as highlighted by Croshaw, gameplay commentators native to YouTube would often come to be know for playing “the same titles,” particularly the popular ones promising a higher viewership.⁴⁹⁶ Aside from this suggestion, another important early restriction that was later formalized within its LP Rules Thread was a rule forbidding the migration of a completed Let's Play on YouTube to the SA Let's Play subforum in order to avoid members circumventing the guiding influence of its rules and

⁴⁹² Slowbeef, comment on “The Let's Play Rules Thread - Yet Another Rule,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 19th, 2008, last modified on March 23rd, 2010, accessed March 23rd, 2015, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2987798>

⁴⁹³ Geop, comment posted on “The Let's Play Rules Thread - UPDATED! No More Three Month Rule!,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on March 6th, 2014, last modified on March 24th, 2015, accessed August 21st, 2017, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3496425>; Slowbeef, comment on “The Let's Play Rules Thread,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on Jul. 18th, 2012, accessed March 23rd, 2015, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3496425>

⁴⁹⁴ Geop, comment posted on “The Let's Play Rules Thread - UPDATED! No More Three Month Rule!,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on March 6th, 2014, last modified on March 24th, 2015, accessed August 21, 2017, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3496425>

⁴⁹⁵ Baldurk, comment on “The Let's Play Sandcastle (Argue about LPs here): Interest Check = Ban,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on May 17th, 2012, last modified on March 19th, 2015, accessed April 1st, 2015, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3485255>

⁴⁹⁶ Ben Croshaw, “Let's Talk About Let's Play,” *The Escapist*, March 8th, 2011, <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/video-games/columns/extra-punctuation/8703-Let-s-Talk-About-Let-s-Play.2>

feedback.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, the necessity for an SA Let's Play to release updates episodically, whether they were gameplay commentary videos or not, within a forum thread gave creators greater access to critical feedback and the opportunity to collaborate with other forum members to produce Let's Plays, thus contributing to a sense of community within SA's Let's Play subforum. Thus, the affordances of an online forum space along with the rules and suggestions adopted within it compelled the gameplay commentators emerging within SA to individually and collectively produce a diverse range of high quality Let's Plays. A different social dynamic, however, often appears within gameplay commentary videos and real-time broadcasts native to YouTube or the livestreaming platform Twitch. On these platforms, a commentator is similarly afforded the ability to engage with his or her fans in real-time within a chat window adjacent to a live broadcast, within a livestreamed or uploaded video through audio commentary, or through text within a video's comment section. In spite of the presence of these types of interaction, the large amount of viewer feedback obtained from these sources is often difficult to moderate, filter, and receive in a focused manner and the relatively passive spectatorship encouraged by these platforms' streaming architecture often disincentivizes the more original forms of collaborative production with viewers and readers found within SA's Let's Play subforums.

Nevertheless, due to gameplay commentary's inherently social dimension and its practitioners' need for an accommodating platform that could host its audiovisual content and whose large userbase could satisfy their affective desire for connection, an increasing amount of early gameplay commentators like ProtonJon and Deceased Crab, who originated on SA, began to use YouTube from 2007 onwards in spite of its initially restrictive time limit for uploads and contributed to the practice's growing presence on the platform over the years. On YouTube, gameplay commentary videos would eventually take on more personalized, homogeneous, and commercial forms. For instance, many commentators emerging on the platform sought to create and upload their own content in pursuit of greater personal recognition, exposure, and social capital along with the financial benefits that accompany their achievement within YouTube's attention economy —goals and motivations that are partially the product of YouTube's discursive promise of creative empowerment to amateur users addressed in the previous chapter.

⁴⁹⁷ Slowbeef, comment on “The Let's Play Rules Thread - Yet Another Rule,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 19th, 2008, last modified on March 23rd, 2010, accessed March 23rd, 2015, <https://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=2987798>

Due to YouTube's neoliberal promise of personal empowerment and the value its platform architecture and its advertising-focused attention- and affect-driven economy accords to viewership numbers, subscriptions, and likes, many gameplay commentators — especially, those who emerged on the platform and whose creativity was not shaped by the values of an alternative environment like SA — were more inclined to pursue higher viewer and subscriber counts with their content in order to obtain more revenue from the audience it cultivated. Some of the techniques afforded by the platform to build this audience involve commentators vocally encouraging fans to share and like their videos and collaborating with other commentators on separate channels in order to attract a portion of their viewership. Usually, in order to achieve this goal, they play together or against each other within a cooperative game or a multiplayer game match wherein they are all co-commentating at the same time about their respective gameplay experiences. In spite of these few collaborative strategies, due to the frequently single-minded and individualistic pursuit of monetizable views incentivized by the platform's user-centric channels, gameplay commentary videos and Let's Plays native to YouTube are often created in relative isolation by solitary creators. Many practitioners and fans of gameplay commentary and Let's Plays have criticized this supposed shift in emphasis amidst commentators originating on YouTube towards the individual personality of the performing commentator. For instance, Croshaw has stated that “the problem with YouTube LPs is that most of them seem to think LP should be about the person commentating rather than the game.”⁴⁹⁸ Echoing this judgment within a thread about the topic on SA's Let's Play subforum, Let's Player Vprisoner has asserted that YouTube commentators are “not here to show off the game; they're here to show off themselves,” valuing “attention (negative or otherwise) above all else.”⁴⁹⁹ While other SA members disagree about the degree to which a commentator's personality or the game should be the focus of Let's Plays and the vast majority of the Let's Play creators who emerged within that forum space have made YouTube their central video hosting platform, they frequently reiterate this judgment. Moreover, they undertake this criticism partly as a reflexive means of highlighting the superiority of the video-based Let's Plays constructed within SA's subforums, whether they

⁴⁹⁸ Ben Croshaw, “Let's Talk About Let's Play,” *The Escapist*, March 8th, 2011, <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/articles/view/video-games/columns/extra-punctuation/8703-Let-s-Talk-About-Let-s-Play.2>

⁴⁹⁹ Vprisoner, comment on “Why are YouTube Let's Plays all so bad?,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on January 26th, 2012, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>

are ultimately uploaded on YouTube or not, and of indirectly heightening the cultural status and 'gaming capital' of their commentators. In his own work, Matt Hills has foregrounded how the online hierarchies constructed through these forms of fan distinctions undermine the discourse of democratization and communal harmony surrounding the Web 2.0 paradigm and the platforms informed by it — a discursive narrative detailed extensively in this dissertation's first section.⁵⁰⁰ In spite of the seemingly self-serving hierarchies constructed by the Let's Players and forum members of SA, the above claims about gameplay commentary videos native to YouTube are not without merit.

Shaped by the platform's architectural emphasis of the individual channel and the pursuit of larger subscriber numbers, its promise of empowered personal expression, and the absence of guidelines or values that encourage commentators to showcase games in a substantive manner, commentators emerging on YouTube tend to privilege the expression of their personal, spontaneous, and affective reactions to an appropriated game — a mode of commentary that is highly popular and attractive on the platform and thus more likely to draw in more viewers. Specifically, this focus often manifests itself through YouTube-based gameplay commentators' tendency to use a facecam in combination with real-time commentary recorded at the same time as the captured gameplay performance. The facecam is a formal feature that is highly indebted to the vlog format popular on the platform and would come to be popularized by YouTube-based commentator PewDiePie. This specific user tactic entails the compositing of real-time camera footage of the performing player's face within an area of the captured gameplay footage, which is displayed on-screen within a commentary video or broadcast, so as to record his or her seemingly authentic facial and affective reactions to a game's unique content. Echoing the similar attraction that vlogs had for YouTube viewers, the appearance of authenticity cultivated by the seemingly spontaneous facial and vocal reactions captured using a facecam in conjunction with a type of microphone and the contagious and pleasurable character of the affect evoked by and expressed within such responses for spectating users are core reasons for why gameplay commentators like PewDiePie and Markiplier, who extensively used such techniques within their videos, would often become highly popular among the users of Google's platform. In order to make the reactions provided by the tactical use of face-oriented camera footage and

⁵⁰⁰ Matt Hills, Fiske's 'Textual Productivity' and Digital Fandom: Web 2.0 Democratization Versus Fan Distinction?" *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (May 2013): 147-150.

synchronized commentary feel more spontaneous and unplanned and further attract more viewers to this attractive type of gameplay commentary video or Let's Play, game genres like horror and unfamiliar or newly released games are often appropriated to be performed by YouTube-based gameplay commentators. These types of genres and games are chosen because they are more likely to produce immediate affect-laden responses such as fright or surprise within the performing player, which are then communicated visually and aurally through facecam and live commentary to his or her viewers. Through the adoption of these user tactics on YouTube, gameplay commentators are more likely to acquire a larger audience of passionate viewers who often pleasurably experience and share their affective reactions to a particular game. Supporting this observation, SA member Jazerus has remarked on this tendency of YouTube-based Let's Players to focus on the production of more "authentic" commentary videos: "There's a very strong bias in youtube LP culture toward making "real videos", i.e. sit down, record the game, and upload whatever comes out, good or bad. [...] It seems to be more about some sense of honesty."⁵⁰¹ YouTube users' desire to produce more authentic and "real" media content, such as the above type of gameplay commentary videos, and the corresponding belief in the platform's capacity to afford such supposedly authentic user-generated content from them and viewers are partial products of the implicit and often explicit idealistic claim of Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube to enable their users to express themselves more freely outside the mediating influence of more traditional mass media industries. Furthermore, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, this cultivated desire to create gameplay commentary videos that better express the individual personality and emotions of the commentator or Let's Player creating them and the immaterial products of the labour involved are ultimately channeled by and integrated within the attention- and affect-related monetization and promotional strategies of YouTube, MCNs, and game companies. As part of the wider apparatus supporting the neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism, the emerging and residual corporate entities connected to this increasingly user-driven online media ecosystem will be later shown to adopt a variety of control strategies in order to channel the products of gameplay commentators' digital labour, such as the affect and attention of YouTube's users and then monetize them. Game companies in

⁵⁰¹ Jazerus, comment on "Why are YouTube Let's Plays all so bad?," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on January 27th, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=4>

particular, however, also attempt to channel the productivity of performing commentators in the hope that they will transmit their seemingly authentic, unmediated, and potentially contagious affective responses to one of their games to the individual members of their YouTube audience and, by extension, encourage the latter to purchase them.

As a consequence of YouTube's neoliberal focus on affording users the ability to express their subjective thoughts, feelings, and personalities and facilitating the rapid distribution of this popular expressive media content, the impulse for gameplay commentators native to the platform to take their time to produce their videos and communicate more thoughtful, informative, and critical knowledge about a game is minimized. In contrast to the easier-to-produce and more user-centric incarnations of gameplay commentary described previously, this alternative impulse, which is found within SA's Let's Play subforum, often entails more time-consuming work and is driven by a less individualistic set of values that views gameplay commentary as having the potential to enlighten others about specific digital games and foster a form of community. For such reasons, this different impulse and the alternative values that shape it often exist in a certain state of tension with YouTube's neoliberal privileging of individual creative user and the profitable pursuit of revenue through their continuous and regular productivity and the monetization of the affect-laden audience relationships it builds. Consequently, by embracing the neoliberal values of the platform's attention economy, many of the commentators native to YouTube — as suggested by SA forum members Xarlaxas and Mulderman — often rapidly produce and upload a large amount of gameplay commentary videos with little effort and work put into them unlike the frequently intermittent release schedule for the more labour-intensive Let's Play videos and updates distributed on SA.⁵⁰² As a result, YouTube-based gameplay commentary videos, which are produced outside the alternative environment and values of SA's Let's Play subforum, often lack the substance, diversity, and quality of the Let's Plays shaped by them. Within the latter site's subforum, Let's Players and forum members like General Ironicus, Jamiethed, Agent Interrobang, and Scaramouche have even specifically attributed this difference to the greater amount of audience interaction and input afforded by SA's forum structure as well

⁵⁰² Xarlaxas, comment on “State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 12th, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=6>; Mulderman, comment on “State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 8th, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>

as the central guidelines, forum moderation, and alternative values privileging quality over quantity — elements which are encouraged and enacted by its community members.⁵⁰³ Although certain technical standards of audiovisual quality were gradually cultivated by YouTube-based gameplay commentators and they came to influence the wider practice of gameplay commentary including its incarnation on SA, the Let's Players emerging out of that particular forum environment were compelled to create gameplay commentary videos in a very different manner – or, more specifically, in a way that was not substantially driven by the pursuit of mass popularity, personal celebrity, and increased revenue valued and encouraged by YouTube's architectural features, the attention economy they cultivate, and the adopted strategies designed to include and channel the productivity of its users. difference reflects the greater amount of affect-driven labour invested within many of the Let's Plays emerging from SA, but also, more importantly, how the predominantly ad-driven attention economy and architectural features of YouTube influences gameplay commentators native to the platform to rapidly produce more personally-focused content with popular formats that can potentially attract a large enough passionate audience of regular viewers which can be monetized for profit.

Privileging the profitable monetization of the attention-based and affective relationships cultivated between online users and commentators as a result of the latter's digital labour, YouTube's economy also compels commentators to appropriate popular and new games that are guaranteed to draw in an already interested audience. Supporting this tendency, SA forum member Octary, in a thread addressing the topic of YouTube-based Let's Plays, has stated that “one of the major problems with the way (YouTube) Let's Plays are being promoted involves the over-saturation of 'popular' games” in pursuit of more views to be monetized for ad revenue.⁵⁰⁴ Slowbeef himself has criticized this very tendency of gameplay commentators on YouTube:

⁵⁰³ General Ironicus, “Link to the Future,” *Tumblr*, October 6th, 2012, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, <http://chip-and-ironicus.tumblr.com/post/33008623678/a-link-to-the-future>; Jamiethed, comment on “Why are YouTube Let's Plays all so bad?,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on January 26th, 2012, [http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=2](http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=2;); Agent Interrobang, comment on “Why are YouTube Let's Plays all so bad?,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on January 27th, 2012, [http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=3](http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=3;); and Scaramouche, comment on “Why are YouTube Let's Plays all so bad?,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, last modified on January 31st, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3462819&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=6>

⁵⁰⁴ Octary, comment on “State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint,” Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 15th, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=9>

“A lot of these people nowadays are just like 'Hey, I got Metal Gear Rising Today. Here's the whole playthrough. I am the first to post it.' And let's face facts here. It's not at all about promoting the game. It's the fact that this is a popular game that people might be googling or looking up on YouTube. And they get the ad revenue off that.”⁵⁰⁵

All of the above user tactics adopted by gameplay commentators native to YouTube reflect how the platform's strategic encouragement of individual user expression and the accumulation of subscribers and "likes" through its discourse and architectural features — especially, its predominantly advertising-focused monetization strategies — shape gameplay commentary's very form and content, often contributing to a more homogeneous popular incarnation of the practice that partially undermines the utopian image of expressive diversity and abundance embedded within Web 2.0 discourse. More specifically, these tactics reveal how the design choices and control strategies adopted by social media platforms like YouTube — which are part of a larger apparatus supporting a communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism — flexibly encourage, control, and shape the creative agency of their users in a manner that leads them to create popular media content which is more compatible with their attention-based and affective economies and, hence, capable of accumulating more revenue from its passionate audiences.

Confronted with this reality, several creators and fans of gameplay commentary formats like Let's Play have perceived money as having a corrupting influence on the practice while others have a more ambivalent view of its growing commercialization. For instance, YouTube-based gameplay commentator Cubemario has argued that, “because money is involved, most of what will happen to LP's outside of SA will get worse.”⁵⁰⁶ In contrast, although SA member Jazerus asserts that “letting long-shot monetization attempts” on YouTube “get in the way of actually LPing is just crass,” he or she concludes that “being fortunate and gaining a little bit of revenue isn't bad for anybody.”⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, Slowbeef, while accepting that commentators profit from their work, criticizes the tendency of YouTube-based Let's Players to make that their sole goal:

⁵⁰⁵ Slowbeef, Diabetus, and ProtonJon. “Retsutalk 24: Nintend'oh!,” May 19th, 2013, podcast audio, Retsupurae, MP3, 1:12:49, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://retsupurae.libsyn.com/24-nintend-oh>

⁵⁰⁶ Cubemario, comment on “State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint,” *Something Awful* Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 18th, 2012,

<http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=10>

⁵⁰⁷ Jazerus, comment on “State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint,” *Something Awful* Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 11th, 2012,

<http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=5>

And what I do feel bad for is the Let's Players who do actually put some fucking work into it and actually have a fucking point besides 'this gets me money.'" I don't even mind that people make money off it [...] but it's so fucking obvious when you're money-grubbing.⁵⁰⁸

Resisting this characterization, some gameplay commentators native to YouTube like Helloween4545 and SSoHPKC often profess that profit is not their key motivation for producing and uploading their gameplay commentary videos or Let's Plays.⁵⁰⁹ This criticism of gameplay commentary videos driven by the pursuit of revenue and the reluctance of commentators to characterize money as the primary motivation for their creative activity also manifests itself in the opposition of a significant amount of practitioners to a recent growth of paid sponsorship deals between gameplay commentators and game companies on YouTube wherein the former are offered additional money or ad revenue to play and commentate over a specific game property and then upload that video onto their channels. In a survey of video game YouTubers including commentators conducted by the website Gamasutra on this topic, reporter Mike Rose finds that more than half of those surveyed were against taking such money with many claiming that "taking money from publishers would damage the integrity of the YouTuber."⁵¹⁰ Moreover, many other commentators do not perceive these agreements as being unethical or having a corrupting influence on their practice.⁵¹¹ While sharing the same reservations about greed and sometimes asserting that YouTube commentators are not singularly motivated by money,⁵¹² certain commentators from the platform like TotalBiscuit, ZackScottGames, Force Strategy Gaming, and Boogie2988 similarly resist this narrative of monetary corruption and profess that ad revenue is necessary in order to fund quality work and enable them to produce it on a full-

⁵⁰⁸ Slowbeef, Diabetus, and ProtonJon. "Retsutalk 24: Nintend'oh!," May 19th, 2013, in *Retsutalk*, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:12:49, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://retsupurae.libsyn.com/24-nintend-oh>

⁵⁰⁹ Helloween4545, "Let's Plays – Claims, Copyright and YouTube," YouTube video, 12:21, posted by "Helloween4545," December 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbduxCRCEXE>; SsoHPK, "Super Mario World Hack with SsoHPK – The Senate Part 5 – Third Party Claims Follow Up," YouTube video, 27: 10, posted by "SsoHPK," December 11th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1RouA9khUE>

⁵¹⁰ Mike Rose, "Pay for Play: The Ethics of Paying for YouTuber Coverage," *Gamasutra*, July 11th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/219671/Pay_for_Play_The_ethics_of_paying_for_YouTuber_coverage.php

⁵¹¹ Mike Rose, "Pay for Play: The Ethics of Paying for YouTuber Coverage," *Gamasutra*, July 11th, 2014, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/219671/Pay_for_Play_The_ethics_of_paying_for_YouTuber_coverage.php; Simon Parkin, "Blurred Lines: Are YouTubers Breaking the Law?," *Eurogamer*, July 16th, 2014, accessed Sept. 21st 2014, <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2014-07-16-blurred-lines-are-youtubers-breaking-the-law>

⁵¹² John Bain (TotalBiscuit), "Content Patch – May 17th, 2013 – Ep. 085 [Nintendo Targets Lets Plays]," YouTube video, 34:08, posted by "TotalBiscuit," May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yX4io2O4EI>

time basis.⁵¹³ Overall, commentators perceived to be solely pursuing profit are often regarded by fellow practitioners and viewers with distaste, but more ambivalent feelings are expressed about the general commercialization of this once informal practice on YouTube.

While occasionally stemming from Let's Players and fans affiliated with or participating within SA's Let's Play subforum with its alternative values, the general ambivalence of even YouTube-based commentators towards the commercialization of gameplay commentary videos on YouTube is a product of two co-existing impulses within its users that are encouraged, afforded, and valued by its distinct set of discursive strategies and architectural choices. For instance, on one hand, YouTube cultivates, within users, a desire to pursue more subscribers, viewers, and ad revenue through its discursive narrative of radical empowerment and its platform features like its subscription and monetization systems. Conversely, at the same time, it also instills a parallel desire within its userbase to engage in heightened forms of expression, creativity, and sharing, so as to accumulate a greater amount of social capital. Although, as seen earlier, such user-driven creativity and expression are strongly valued by SA's Let's Play-centered forum community, they are also required by Google's platform in order for it generate a growing amount of revenue from the advertising intended to accompany it. The tension between these co-existing impulses within YouTube — the accumulation of more ad revenue and the pursuit of social capital through participatory communication — thus somewhat complicates the view of some Let's Players and members of SA's Let's Play subforum that commentators and Let's Players native to Google's platform as being predominantly driven by the pursuit of financial gain. For instance, in research examining how YouTube's architecture creates an attention economy and shapes the practice of gameplay commentary, Hector Postigo has remarked upon the “tension between those social–technical affordances and structures that serve the accumulation of social capital and those that serve the accumulation of revenue.”⁵¹⁴ As the end of his analysis, Postigo concludes that the accumulation of revenue through increased

⁵¹³ For examples of videos where this type of defensive rhetoric is expressed by gameplay commentators, see John Bain (TotalBiscuit), “Content Patch – May 17th, 2013 – Ep. 085 [Nintendo Targets Lets Plays],” YouTube video, 34:08, posted by “TotalBiscuit,” May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yX4io2O4EI>; Zack Scott, “Thoughts on Nintendo Claiming Let's Plays (Vlog),” YouTube video, 10:05, posted by “ZackScottGames,” May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcdFfNzJfB4>; Force Strategy Gaming, “YouTube Content ID Apocalypse (What's Going On?),” YouTube video, 11:08, posted by “Force Strategy Gaming,” Dec. 10th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6-TOZat-wo>; Boogie2988, “Copyright-Gate: Get A Real Job!!!,” YouTube video, 6:46, posted by “Boogie2988,” Dec. 12th, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIh6t0d_MuA

⁵¹⁴ Hector Postigo, “The Social-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money,” *New Media and Society* 18, no. 2 (February 2016): 344, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814541527>.

subscriber recruitment, which is structurally encouraged and value by YouTube's architecture, can often conflict with the structures of the platform that seek to privilege communal forms of sharing:

The subscriber is the basic currency in this system. Their recruitment and retention translates into revenue for YouTube. YouTube Stars and game commentators in the case of this article, serve as one of the means by which YouTube retains viewers. In that sense, those YouTubers with large subscriber bases are a management class harnessing (into channel views) and maintaining (retention and channel growth) the value of subscribers which function as the basic currency and labor within the digital labor architecture. Importantly, subscribers and game commentators live in the same normative environment where sharing and community must be prioritized. Gameplay commentators and those in the YouTube Partner Program also live in the life-world where capital accumulation is important and so have sometimes-conflicting values.⁵¹⁵

SA-based gameplay commentator Willie Tomg reinforces Postigo's valid perception of how the structure of YouTube incentivizes commentators to pursue subscribers to consume their content:

On Youtube the issue is one of snagging so many subscribers, then keeping them occupied with X% of content in Y timeframe. Once something is profitable and stable, with an ablative layer of youtube fans to keep the channel afloat, there isn't any incentive to push past it...⁵¹⁶

Supporting this assertion, the architectural choices of YouTube like its open-ended inclusion of user-generated content, its subscription tab, its ad-driven monetization strategies, and the transparently visible viewership and 'like' numbers for user videos ultimately encouraged gameplay commentators to pursue the acquisition of a large monetizable and attentive audience through the regular production of media content. Although gameplay commentary videos, like fanvid parodies, seemingly embody the explicit form of participation previously described by Schäfer in the introduction due to the appropriative act at their center, their contemporaneous and flexible integration within YouTube's ad-driven attention economy through the platform's design choices also reveals their proximity to his conception of implicit participation in that this voluntary type of creative and productive media activity from users and gaming fans was anticipated by such design decisions, which actively sought to channel the valuable immaterial products of the labour involved and convert it into profit. As will be seen later in this chapter,

⁵¹⁵ Postigo, "The Social-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor: Converting Play into YouTube Money," 344-345.

⁵¹⁶ Willie Tomg, comment on "State of Let's Play – A Different Viewpoint," Something Awful Let's Play subforum, comment posted on October 7th, 2012, <http://forums.somethingawful.com/showthread.php?threadid=3510703&userid=0&perpage=40&pagenumber=1>

gameplay commentary's status as a form of implicit participation increasingly channeled and encouraged by social media platforms will become more visible as YouTube itself increasingly constructs new platform features and monetization options intended to encourage this user-driven online media practice and generate more revenue from the digital labour shaping it and the immaterial audience relationships this labour produces.

Aside from what will be shown to be the gradual commercialization of the practice by YouTube, the productive activity of gameplay commentators native to the platform — in particular, the form and content of their commentary videos — are also substantially influenced by the architectural design choices and discourse surrounding Google's platform and their encouragement of the above pursuit of higher subscriber and viewership numbers and ad revenue through the increased production of user content. For instance, influenced by this neoliberal impulse to accumulate more wealth from the social productivity of citizens, which the platform seeks to inculcate within its participating users, individual gameplay commentators frequently adopt an individualistic form of creative subjectivity that compels them to rapidly produce more formally simplistic videos — videos that are easier to create than the SA-related Let's Plays described in earlier paragraphs. These videos typically involve unplanned and spontaneous voice-over commentary recorded in conjunction with a captured gameplay performance. If they do involve some editing, they often include simple edits in order to create a highlight reel of relevant gameplay footage or to eliminate errors and dead air and adopt shorter formats than a Let's Play such as highlight compilations, recorded multiplayer matches, and first impressions or preview videos of new game releases. As suggested earlier, contrary to the image of greater diversity and freedom of creative expression and participation cultivated within discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and online platforms informed by it, the chosen platform features and discursive strategies constructed by YouTube to encourage and profitably channel the creative agency of online users as well as to flexibly direct it towards the production of popular content whose audience can be monetized have significantly shaped the content and form of the gameplay commentary videos uploaded within it. Akin to Jarrett's argument detailed in the introduction, the participatory interactions of users with the platform's features — while always retaining the networked form of tactical agency and autonomy recognized by autonomist Marxists and scholars like Dijck and Cohen and also previously described in the introduction— thus have a disciplining effect that tends to compel them into inhabiting a neoliberal and

seemingly empowered form of creative subjectivity that produces the type of content most beneficial to YouTube's commercial interests. This more indirect influence on this type of user-driven online media practice through YouTube's design strategies embodies the growing apparatus of flexible control emerging to support a new communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and its active channeling of the creative agency of online users and its resulting products.

The Transformation of Gameplay and Game Commentary into Productive Forces

While the productive online participation of gameplay commentators is shaped by its increasing integration within the attention economy and its anticipation by the platform architecture of YouTube — similar to Schäfer's notion of implicit participation — the very capacity of its resulting media content to be hosted on social media platforms and watched by a large passionate audience of monetizable viewers necessitates that the ephemeral and interactive quality that game studies scholars like David Cameron and John Carroll ascribe to gameplay be converted into a more linear and less interactive form.⁵¹⁷ By being converted into gameplay commentary videos that can circulate on social media platforms, the once contingent, ephemeral, and interactive tactics of gaming fans have become, as suggested by Manovich in the previous chapter, more permanent, visible, and mappable.⁵¹⁸ Complementing this trend, Jean Burgess and Ramon Lobato have similarly illustrated how user-generated media content, once informal in character, has undergone a process of formalization on platforms like YouTube due to its increasing regulation and mapping within these spaces.⁵¹⁹ As a result of this qualitative change in how gameplay is experienced, the less interactive and more mappable gameplay commentary videos on YouTube — as will be demonstrated later in this section — support the profit-driven monetization strategies of Google and MCNs and the attention-dependent and affective economies they cultivate. They will also be shown to complement the promotional strategies of game publishers and for the productive labour involved to be easier to control and

⁵¹⁷ David Cameron and John Carroll, "Encoding Liveness: Performance and Real-Time Rendering in Machinima," *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 128.

⁵¹⁸ Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?," 324-326.

⁵¹⁹ Jean Burgess, "YouTube and the Formalisation of Amateur Media," in *Amateur Media: Social, Cultural, and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Dan Hunter, Ramon Lobato, Megan Richardson, and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 53-58; Ramon Lobato, Julian Thomas, and Dan Hunter. "Histories of User-Generated Content: Between Formal and Informal Economics," in *Amateur Media: Social, Cultural, and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Dan Hunter, Ramon Lobato, Megan Richardson, and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7, 13.

channel by these corporate actors. For instance, YouTube-based gameplay commentators' quick production of less interactive content, which tend to appropriate new game releases, meshes well with the game industry's constant push of novel media commodities and with its intended targeting of receptive audience members with promotional advertising about recently released and upcoming games. Seeing this commercial potential, game companies, Google, and MCNs rapidly recognized the productive value of gameplay commentary and the passionate affective responses it evoked within online users. More specifically, they perceived gameplay commentators and their video-based content as a low-cost means of: transmitting positive affective and emotional responses to a new game release to viewers and potentially cultivating an affective relationship between them and a particular game; building a large passionate and receptive audience of spectating gamers that can be better targeted with ads from a variety of brands and media corporations including game companies; and converting the attention-based and affective relationships between this audience and gameplay commentators into potential profit and financial gain through their monetization or their use as a means to attract investments from other media companies. While indirectly promoting games, influencing the viewers of gameplay commentary videos to make future purchases, and gathering gaming fans together to be more easily targeted by the marketing of game companies, this practice is also inherently productive for the game industry in that it requires commentators to purchase games. Due to these effects, game companies and publishers quickly perceived the direct commercial benefits of gameplay commentary and how the affective relationships it shapes between commentator, game, and viewer can help them promote and sell their products. Interestingly, by producing these immaterial affective relationships between varying elements in a manner similar to those cultivated by the creators of fanvid parodies, the labour involved in gameplay commentary videos can also be said to have much in common with Hardt and Negri's concept of immaterial labour and its capacity to create specific affective and emotional responses in others.⁵²⁰ Lending credence to this parallel, due to its potential to communicatively transmit immaterial affective responses and media images to others, post-Marxist media scholars like Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter have characterized player-driven forms of productive play similar to gameplay commentary as manifestations of immaterial labour performed by the gaming

⁵²⁰ For a definition of the concept, see Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 108.

multitude.⁵²¹ While also driven by the affect of gaming fans, it is important to foreground again how the labour involved in the production of gameplay commentary videos is attractive to creative users and various corporate actors like game companies and users precisely for its ability to transmit, to potential viewers, the affect-laden reactions of performing commentators to the game they appropriate. This capacity for affective transmission is another element that makes gameplay commentary videos such a compelling resource for game companies seeking to cultivate and spread positive feelings about their properties.

Aside from their affective dimension, the labour involved in gameplay commentary videos echoes another aspect of Hardt and Negri's conception of immaterial labour, which is the dissolution of the boundaries between leisure and labour and the capture of play's productivity by capital within a networked information economy.⁵²² Due to this emerging reality, many game studies scholars like Julian Kücklich have created various terms such as "playbour" in order to describe this cultural phenomena.⁵²³ This blurring of boundaries stands in mark contrast to the past work of play theorists such as Johan Huizinga and Roger Callois and the writings of cultural critics like Jeremy Rifkin, all of whom have framed play, to a degree, as a free, unproductive, ephemeral, but still rule-bound category of cultural experience separate or initially autonomous

⁵²¹ See Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism And Videogames*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6, 23-27; Greig De Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Playful Multitude? Mobilising and Counter-Mobilising Immaterial Game Labour," *The Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005): <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-024-a-playful-multitude-mobilising-and-counter-mobilising-immaterial-game-labour/>

⁵²² Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 402-403; Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where all of Life is a Paid-for Experience*. (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam, 2000), 260-266.

⁵²³ For work exploring the increasing blurring of boundaries between labour and play, especially within the game industry and player culture, see McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), para 16; Celia Pearce, "Productive Play: Game Culture from the Bottom Up," *Games and Culture* 1, no. 1 (January 2006): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412005281418>; Sal Humphreys, "Productive Players: Online Computer Games' Challenge to Conventional Media Forms," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 40-48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1479142042000332116>; Nick Yee, "The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play," *Games and Culture* 1, no. 1 (Jan 2006): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412005281819>; Hector Postigo, "From Pong to Planet Quake: Post-Industrial Transitions from Leisure to Work," *Information, Communication, and Society* 6, no. 4 (2003): 593-607, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118032000163277>; Olli Sotamaa, "Let Me Take You to The Movies: Productive Players, Commodification and Transformative Play," *Convergence* 13, no. 4 (2007): 384-398, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507081961>; Julian Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry," *Fibreculture Journal* 5 (December 2005), <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarius-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/>; Judd Ethan Ruggill, Ken S. McAllister, and David Menchaca, "The Gamework," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1, no. 4 (Dec 2004): 297-312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1479142042000270449>; Hanna Wirman, "On Productivity and Game Fandom," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 3. (2009). <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/145/115>

from the more serious and material realm of commerce and work.⁵²⁴ Likewise, social anthropologist David Graeber in a 2014 piece for *The Baffler* suggests the possible existence of a principle of ludic freedom embodied by the free play of animals — play which, under particular circumstances, become "an end in itself."⁵²⁵ Resisting the acknowledgment of play as a form of labour that has come to accompany this growing blurring of boundaries, the liberatory conception of play as a cultural activity existing in opposition to labour and the constraints associated it — which is expressed by the above theorists and writers — is frequently present within discourse emanating from the game industry. For instance, since the days of Atari in the 1970s, employment in the game industry, particularly for game testers, has been repeatedly framed more as more play than labour as a means to attract workers, even though its workforce is constantly plagued by poor compensation, weak job security, and over-work.⁵²⁶ A parallel situation is also visible in e-sports — competitions involving the performance of digital games by multiple competing players. Here, as detailed in the work of game studies scholars like T.L. Taylor and Dal Yong Jin and recent documentary films centered on this growing sphere of gaming like *Frag* (2008), professional game players — who are attracted by the lure of play as a liberating and pleasurable activity — ultimately engage in precarious forms of labour that are often more productive for sponsors and the organizers of gaming tournaments than for themselves.⁵²⁷ Further extending into the realm of play-based gaming interactions, this discursive association of play with a form of freedom is also sold to potential players as a means of encouraging them to purchase gaming hardware or specific games and of cultivating, within them, a particular affective relationship with a given gaming brand. For example, game console manufacturer Sony's European ad "Double Life" (1999) and its later ad "The World is in Play" (2012) for its Playstation and Playstation Vita hardware, respectively, would present play as either an escape from the more serious realm of work or as a separate and fulfilling secret

⁵²⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: The Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), 13; Roger Callois, *Man, Play, and Games* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), 9-10; Rifkin, *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism, Where all of Life is a Paid-for Experience*, 264.

⁵²⁵ David Graeber, "What's The Point if We Can't Have Fun?" *The Baffler* 24 (2014), <http://thebaffler.com/salvos/whats-the-point-if-we-cant-have-fun>

⁵²⁶ See Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greg De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism And Videogames* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 12, 53-65; Jimmy Tang, "The Tough Life of a Game Tester," *IGN*, last modified March 29, 2012, accessed April 14th, 2012, <http://games.ign.com/articles/122/1221612p1.html>

⁵²⁷ Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: e-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*, 176-179; Dal Yong Jin, *Korea's Online Gaming Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010), 92-95; 95-99; and *Frag*, directed by Mike Pasley, (2008; Montreal, Quebec: Id Communications Inc., 2008), DVD.

identity that exists behind a facade of normalcy.⁵²⁸ According to art historian Julian Stallabrass and critical media scholars like Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig De Peuter, this portrayal of play as a potential embodiment of freedom or as a distinct phenomenon from labour often masks the exploitation of play-based immaterial labour in the game industry and obstructs players from contemplating the socio-economic and cultural forces that inform the gaming experience.⁵²⁹ While the boundaries between play and labour become increasingly blurred within the game industry in that play has increasingly become productive for it, the concept of play is still idealistically represented — contrary to the more nuanced characterization of play-based online tactics by Julie Cohen in the introduction — as a cultural activity that is detached from the serious constraints usually associated with capital-labour relations and which entails a greater amount of freedom than labour.

Supporting Hardt and Negri's contention about the increasing blurring of play and labour within the networked information economies that have come to represent Empire, contemporary scholars analyzing social media have also begun to recognize this blurring of boundaries along with online media platforms' increasingly strategic discursive deployment of the above conception of play as an empowering and idealistic practice distinct from labour. For instance, José van Dijck underlines how this blurring of boundaries between work and play is a core part of social media platforms like YouTube where volunteered labour is not “conceived of as work, but as fun or play.”⁵³⁰ As argued by Papacharissi, digital media platforms often attract and exploit the productivity of their users motivated by affect by framing this activity as “empowering forms of play.”⁵³¹ While unaddressed in the first section's solitary chapter about Web 2.0 rhetoric, this strategic suggestion of play as this alternative form of cultural activity is another element frequently present within Web 2.0 discourse as well as another affect-laden discursive strategy often adopted by platforms like YouTube and MCNs as a means to consciously or affectively compel networked users like gameplay commentators to productively participate within them and then channel their creative agency and convert it into revenue.

⁵²⁸ "Playstation Advert: Double Life - #20YearsofPlay," YouTube video, 1:01, posted by "Playstation EU," December 2nd, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIW4HMI81hw>; "PS Vita - The World is in Play," YouTube video, 1:00, posted by "psvita," February 13th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGNxHa0bqCI>

⁵²⁹ See Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig De Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 17-22; Julian Stallabrass, “Just Gaming: Allegory and Economy in Computer Games,” *New Left Review* I, no. 198 (March-April 1993): 83-106.

⁵³⁰ van Dijck, “Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content,” 51.

⁵³¹ Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, 23.

Christian Fuchs, for his part, has criticized the utopian discourse of empowerment surrounding Web 2.0 platforms and digital media by asserting that the exploitation of labour within this new realm of media is often hidden and presented as a fun form of play within this rhetoric, thus rendering it an activity that is indistinguishable from labour and thus capable of productively generating value for capital through its exploitation.⁵³² Complementing this perspective, Jodi Dean, in her own work on social media, suggests how communicative capitalism — the dominant neoliberal mode of capitalism driving this new user-driven online media ecosystem— perpetuates this same blurring of work and play to the point where it creates “work without work (in the forms of work without pay or work that is fun) and play without play (in the forms of play for which one is paid and play for which one pays with enjoyment).”⁵³³ Echoing a less totalizing incarnation of Dean's concept of communicative capitalism, Deleuze's societies of control, and Hardt and Negri's notion of Empire, Alexander Galloway has even argued that this newfound embrace of play within what he calls 'ludic capitalism' and a 'play economy' has replaced “old concepts of discipline, hierarchy, bureaucracy, and muscle.”⁵³⁴ In the new era of ludic capitalism, Galloway asserts that “labor itself is now play, just as play becomes more and more laborious.”⁵³⁵ Although this image of radical change from the world of discipline is an exaggeration, in his view, this profitable form of play now prized by this contemporary ludic mode of capitalism is indebted to two different conceptions of play: 1) a romantic conception associated with notions of authentic creativity partially exemplified by the work of Huizinga; and 2) a differing representation influenced by cybernetics, which instead connects play with notions of systemic interaction and balance and, thus, echoes that of Cohen inspired by De Certeau's view of everyday tactics.⁵³⁶ More importantly, he argues that, from the fusion of these two conceptions and the trends they embody, the ludic capitalist is born, which he describes as the “the consummate poet-designer, forever coaxing new value out of raw, systemic interactions (consider the example of Google).”⁵³⁷ Social media platforms like YouTube and their gradual incorporation of playful user-driven media practices and tactics like gameplay commentary through their designed systems and strategies thus embody this growing shift towards a

⁵³²Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 122-126.

⁵³³Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, 75.

⁵³⁴Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 27.

⁵³⁵Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 29.

⁵³⁶Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 27-28.

⁵³⁷Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, 29.

communicative and ludic mode of neoliberal capitalism and its increasingly flexible and expansive inclusion of this type of online cultural and media activity and the creative agency it reflects.

In order to foster and encourage this type of playful user interaction with its systems and strategies, however, social media platforms like YouTube tend to discursively represent themselves as spaces enabling online users to engage in play and "fun" participatory activities. For instance, on its official blog before its official launch in December 2005, YouTube would present itself as affording consumers an inclusive platform to "broadcast their videos globally in a fast, fun and easy way."⁵³⁸ Moreover, from its purchase by Google in November 2006 to the present, its community guidelines have always invited potential users to "have fun with the site" or to "Join in and have fun" by participating within it and creating media content for it.⁵³⁹ YouTube's discursive encouragement of a playful sense of "fun" within its users and its rhetorical association of the platform with this characteristic are also complemented by its frequent tendency to encourage its users to "play" with the platform and its changing features. For example, within announcements for a new video editing tool and other additional design options for channels, YouTube encourages users to "play" with them.⁵⁴⁰ Moreover, on a blog post announcing new design features and options for channels, users are similarly encouraged to "have fun playing around" with them.⁵⁴¹ This type of rhetoric characterizes the form of free labour by online users involved in this type of beta-testing as a pleasurable, free and "fun" type of play, thus minimizing and partially repressing the questions about exploitation, constraint, and unequal power relations that typically accompany discussions of capital and labour. Lastly, within a post on YouTube's official blog promoting a keynote lecture at the Consumer Electronics Show of 2012 by Robert Kyncl, YouTube's vice president of global content partnerships, Kyncl would write of the expanding and democratizing opportunities within online video afforded by the Web and ultimately invite users to participate on the YouTube platform

⁵³⁸ "YouTube Receives \$3.5M in Funding From Sequoia Capital," *YouTube's Official Blog*, November 7th, 2005, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2005/11/youtube-receives-35m-in-funding-from.html>

⁵³⁹ "Community Guidelines," *YouTube*, accessed August 13th, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/policyandsafety/communityguidelines.html>

⁵⁴⁰ Rushabh Doshi, "Edit Video in the Cloud with the YouTube Video Editor," *YouTube's Official Blog*, June 16th, 2010, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2010/06/edit-video-in-cloud-with-youtube-video.html>; "Tis the Season to Decorate: Make Your Channel a Home for the Holidays and Beyond!", *YouTube's Official Blog*, December 8th, 2011, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2011/12/tis-season-to-decorate-make-your.html>

⁵⁴¹ AJ Crane, "Changing the Channel(s)", *YouTube Creator Blog*, November 17th, 2011, <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2011/11/changing-channels.html>

and "play with us."⁵⁴² As will be further detailed later in this chapter, YouTube would further link the platform itself to gaming and the concept of play with the eventual introduction of YouTube Gaming, a new livestreaming platform, hub, and app that aggregates game-related content like gameplay commentary videos and facilitates real-time streaming spectatorship for creators and users. Announced in June 2015, YouTube Gaming is presented as an upcoming platform that Google is building "just for gamers" and which, when ready, they will be allowed "to play with."⁵⁴³ Similarly, gaming-focused MCNs based on YouTube also repeatedly characterize their partnership programs as enabling gameplay commentators to benefit from their play and engage in a less labour-intensive form of activity that brings them closer to the realm of games itself and its communities.

Constantly reinforced within various parts of the gaming industry and within social media platforms like YouTube, the discursive separation of play from labour — which persists amidst the contemporaneous blurring of boundaries between the two — has become so dominant within these cultural spaces that it is also addressed to gameplay commentators by viewers who assert that their play-based practice is not a “real job.” YouTube-based gameplay commentators and Let's Players like GhostRobo are thus constantly defending themselves against this accusation with statements about the labour necessary to produce their content:

“A lot of people say 'Oh, get a real job. This isn't hard work.' No, you know, we're not carrying boxes around, we're not chopping down trees, we're not slaving away in some coal mine or factory, it's not hard in that sense. But this does take a lot of effort. There's so much that goes on behind the scenes.”⁵⁴⁴

Fellow gameplay commentator Zack Scott, who also uploads his videos on YouTube, confronts this discourse with the assertion that “Being an entertainer is a real job” and similarly emphasizes the hard work, time, and creativity required to capture, produce, and distribute his content.⁵⁴⁵ Contrary to the accusations which frame the work of gameplay commentators as not being a real job, commentators are indeed engaging in 'real' labour regardless of its connection to

⁵⁴² Robert Kyncl, "The Opportunity for Video on the Web," *YouTube's Official Blog*, January 18th, 2012, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2012/01/opportunity-for-video-on-web.html>

⁵⁴³ Alan Joyce, "A YouTube built for Gamers," *YouTube's Official Blog*, June 12th, 2015, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2015/06/a-youtube-built-for-gamers.html>

⁵⁴⁴ Ghostrobo, "YouTube Copyright Apocalypse (100+ of MY videos affected!!)," YouTube video, 16:24, posted by "GhostRobo," Dec. 10th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaJF0-BkXRg>

⁵⁴⁵ Zack Scott, "Thoughts on Nintendo Claiming Let's Plays (Vlog)," YouTube video, 10:05, posted by "ZackScottGames," May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcdFfNzJfB4>

play through the performance of an appropriated game or the tactical user interactions necessary to upload their media content on YouTube. Nevertheless, the game industry discourse and Web 2.0 rhetoric detailed in the previous paragraph, which still often implicitly or explicitly relies on a dominant conception of play as being distinct from labour, ultimately masks this reality and, in the process, weakens the capacity of commentators to profit from their labour. Moreover, Taylor has rightly criticized the tendency to view the blurring between play and work as being invisible to players or as a sign of the corruption of the former.⁵⁴⁶ Conversely, she believes that the transformation of play into work should not be so easily framed as a reflection of the “pure misery” of player exploitation by gaming corporations.⁵⁴⁷ As will be illustrated in the rest of this chapter, the commercialization of gameplay commentary by platform owners, game companies, and MCNs might, in fact, be the more distinctive and subversive quality of this appropriation-based practice because it does still allow players to profit from the productive play grounding their fan activity and potentially gain a certain degree of power within the video game industry.

Industry Acceptance and the Flexible Control of Gameplay Commentary

Confronted with the productive and beneficial value of the play of gameplay commentators, the video game industry — as seen in the work of Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter among others — has continued its longstanding tendency to strategically encourage various forms of player productivity including game mods, in-game content, and machinima while attempting to channel it to its benefit.⁵⁴⁸ More specifically, it continued to adopt this more inclusive and seemingly collaborative strategic approach to user-generated media content appropriating their copyrighted games by beginning to actively encourage the creation of gameplay commentary videos featuring captured footage of their games and player-created audio commentary as a means to benefit from the attention that their creators would bring brought to them. For instance, in October 2011, Nintendo appropriated the term Let's Play for promotional purposes and asked fans to create gameplay commentary videos as part of a YouTube contest designed to draw attention to the release of its role-playing game *Xenoblade Chronicles* for the

⁵⁴⁶ Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: e-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*, 98-100.

⁵⁴⁷ Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: e-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*, 100.

⁵⁴⁸ For examples of instances where the video game industry supported and encouraged this form of player productivity, see Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism And Videogames*, 23-27; James Newman, *Playing with Video games* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175-178; Kelland, Morris, and Lloyd, *Machinima: Making Animated Movies in 3D Virtual Environments*, 35, 48, 69, 99, 58; Matt Kelland, “From Game Mod to Low-Budget Film: The Evolution of Machinima,” *The Machinima Reader*, eds. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011), 26-28.

Nintendo Wii console.⁵⁴⁹ Furthermore, embodying another strategy to encourage user-driven social media practices revolving around the distribution of captured gameplay, game publishers like Activision, Square Enix, and Capcom began to insert tools into their games in order to facilitate the capture of gameplay and its distribution as uploads or live broadcasts on online media platforms.⁵⁵⁰ Similarly, Microsoft and Sony have strategically incorporated similar gameplay capture and livestreaming functions — the Upload feature and the Share button, respectively — into the launch iterations of their next generation consoles: the Xbox One and the Playstation 4.⁵⁵¹ However, despite seemingly encouraging online users to create gameplay commentary videos, the background systems structuring the hardware features of Sony's Playstation 4, for instance, afford unique privileges and a disproportionate amount of control to video game companies above players. More specifically, they enable game developers to disable the functionality of its Share button to prevent the gameplay capture of particular segments from their games like cut-scenes or any footage.⁵⁵² Embodying the emerging apparatus of flexible control supporting communicative capitalism and the user-driven online media ecosystem that it drives, such promotional and platform-dependent strategies reveal the increasing tendency of various corporations within the video game industry to adopt a less restrictive and more inclusive approach when it comes to user-generated media content produced by the players of their

⁵⁴⁹ “Create Your Own Let's Play Video Contest,” *Nintendo*, 4th October, 2011, accessed on March 21st, 2015, http://www.nintendo.co.uk/NOE/en_GB/news/2011/create_your_own_lets_play_video_contest_launches_for_xenoblade_chronicles_44994.html

⁵⁵⁰ For examples of the anticipation and encouragement of gameplay capture and upload, see Emily Gera, “Call of Duty: Black Ops 2 Includes YouTube Livestreaming at Launch,” *Polygon*, November 8th, 2012, <http://www.polygon.com/2012/11/8/3617204/call-of-duty-black-ops-2-includes-youtube-livestreaming-at-launch>; “Exclusive Uncharted 2 Cinema Mode Interview – Inside Gaming,” YouTube video, 5:24, posted by “machinima,” August 31st, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG5kwtsDXfE>; Delriach, “Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Features YouTube Support, GGPO,” *The SixthAxis*, June 7th, 2011, <http://www.thesixthaxis.com//2011/06/07/street-fighter-iii-3rd-strike-features-youtube-support-ggpo/>; James Orry, “YouTube Video Uploading for Just Cause 2 on PS3,” *VideoGamer*, January 25th, 2010, http://www.videogamer.com/ps3/just_cause_2/news/youtube_video_uploading_for_just_cause_2_on_ps3.html

⁵⁵¹ “What is Upload,” Xbox.com, accessed March 21st, 2015, http://www.xbox.com/en-US/entertainment/xbox-one/live-apps/upload-studio/upload_qa; “PS4: The Ultimate FAQ – North America,” Playstation.com, October 30th, 2013, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://blog.us.playstation.com/2013/10/30/ps4-the-ultimate-faq-north-america/#sect11>

⁵⁵² Chris Kohler, “Sony is Screwing Up Game Streaming on Playstation 4,” *Wired*, July 7th, 2015, <http://www.wired.com/2013/05/sony-ps4-streaming/>; Matthew Reynolds, “PS4 Share Play: What you can and can't do while sharing a game,” *Digital Spy*, October 27th, 2014, <http://www.digitalspy.com/gaming/ps4/feature/a605473/ps4-share-play-what-you-can-and-cant-do-while-sharing-a-game/>

copyrighted games, so as to better profit from the resulting productivity and the audience relations that it cultivates.

A similar type of strategy, which is also designed to control and shape gameplay capture and player commentary as a means to profit from the exposure such play-based video content can bring, also manifests itself within the game industry in the form of game publishers' increasing adoption of more open-ended and less restrictive End-User License Agreements (EULAs) or contracts, terms of use, and video policies. For example, in the published video policies and EULAs for their games, game publishers like Blizzard, Valve, Ubisoft, and Microsoft accord consumers the right to create and monetize work using their content on social media platforms like YouTube or Twitch, although, occasionally, an affiliation with the partnership program on a social media platform or an MCN based within them is required.⁵⁵³ By guiding potential gameplay commentators to adopt social media platforms like YouTube and be part of the partnership programs that are located there, such a requirement ends up being highly beneficial for the owners of these platforms and the MCNs connected to them, both of which are able to channel the productivity of an increased number of commentators. Smaller independent game companies and publishers ranging from Mojang to Capybara Games and Klei Entertainment also openly encourage appropriation-based practices like gameplay commentary videos. Within their own published policies involving user-generated content on YouTube and other platforms, they tentatively allow gameplay commentators to create and monetize video content using their games with fewer restrictions, so as to benefit from the low-cost exposure and potential sales they could bring to their titles.⁵⁵⁴ Mike Bithell, the independent developer of the

⁵⁵³ For examples of such video policies and end-user agreements and their tolerance of gameplay commentary as a practice, "Blizzard Video Policy," *Blizzard Entertainment*, accessed on March 21st, 2015, <http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/legal/videopolicy.html>; "Ubisoft, YouTube, and Copyrights," *Ubisoft*, accessed January 6th, 2014, <http://blog.ubi.com/ubisoft-youtube-and-copyrights/>; "Final Fantasy XIV Materials Usage License," *Square Enix*, accessed January 6th, 2014, <http://support.na.square-enix.com/rule.php?id=5382&tag=authc>; "Valve Video Policy," *Valve*, accessed January 6th, 2014, <http://www.valvesoftware.com/videopolicy.html>; Mike Futter, "Deep Silver Issues Comprehensive Statement on YouTube Copyright Claims," *Game Informer*, December 11th, 2013, <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2013/12/11/deep-silver-issues-comprehensive-statement-on-youtube-copyright-claims.aspx>; "Game Content Usage Rules," *Xbox*, last modified on January 2015, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.xbox.com/en-US/community/developer/rules>; "Riot Games FAQ And Guidelines For The Community's Use of Our Intellectual Property," *Riot Games*, Accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.riotgames.com/legal-jibber-jabber>

⁵⁵⁴ For examples of the greater acceptance of gameplay commentary within the indie gaming space, see Ben Kuchera, "Devolver Digital shows Nintendo how it's done with YouTube monetization statement," *Polygon*, January 30th, 2015, <http://www.polygon.com/2015/1/30/7952605/devolver-digital-nintendo-youtube>; "YouTube Monetization," *Mojang*, last modified on August 11th, 2014, accessed March 21st, 2015, <https://help.mojang.com/customer/portal/articles/1389657-youtube-monetization>; "YouTube Permission," *Capybara*

game *Thomas Was Alone* (2012), would even confirm the potential of gameplay commentary videos to benefit smaller companies by stating that the coverage they provided had a positive effect on his game's sales.⁵⁵⁵ Reflecting a different actualization of this new mode of flexible control through public policy and contracts, other game companies like 2K Games, Rockstar Games, Bungie, and Remedy Games, while still encouraging the creation of these gameplay videos within their terms of use or video policies, occasionally opt to forbid their monetization with ads and their sale.⁵⁵⁶ In addition, certain game developers like Rockstar Games often retain the right to own and commercialize media content resulting from the appropriation of their software by players — like gameplay commentary videos — within their EULAs regardless of their consent.⁵⁵⁷ Providing certain conditions for the productive digital play and labour of gameplay commentators while refraining from completely restricting their creative agency or guiding it to take a singular pre-determined form, all of the above strategies are part of an emerging apparatus of flexible control that supports a communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and attempts to encourage, guide, and channel the playful creative autonomy and tactics of online users to the primary benefit of the various capitalistic interests currently composing our increasingly user-driven online media ecosystem.

Games, November 29th, 2012, <http://www.capybaragames.com/youtube-permission/>; “YouTube Monetization Permission,” *Bohemia Interactive*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.bistudio.com/community/game-content-usage-rules/monetization-youtube/>; “About,” *Double Fine Productions*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.doublefine.com/about/>; “Contact,” *DrinkBox Studios*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://drinkboxstudios.com/blog/contact/>; “Player Creation Guidelines,” *Don'tStarveGame.com*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.dontstarvegame.com/player-creation-guidelines/>; “Mossmouth Video Monetization Policy,” *Mossmouth*, August 30th, 2013, <http://mossmouth.tumblr.com/post/59786950104/mossmouth-video-monetization-policy/>; “Inquiry,” *Playdead*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://playdead.com/inquiry/>; “Message to YouTubers,” *Red Barrels*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://www.redbarrelsgames.com/contact.php>; “Fan Art / Video Policy,” *Torchlight2game.com*, last updated January 16th, 2013, <http://www.torchlight2game.com/legal/fan-art-video-policy/>; “Policy on Let's Play Videos,” *Supergiant Games*, last updated on May 19th, 2014, <http://www.supergiantgames.com/blog/policy-on-lets-play-videos/>

⁵⁵⁵ Mike Bithell, “Let's Play Nintendo,” *Develop*, May 16th, 2013, <http://www.develop-online.net/opinions/let-s-play-nintendo/0118053>

⁵⁵⁶ For examples of slightly more restrictive video policies and terms of use when it comes to gameplay commentary, see “Bungie.net Terms of Use,” *Bungie.net*, last modified on December 10th, 2014, accessed March 21st, 2015, <https://www.bungie.net/en/View/Bungie/terms>; 2K David, “Policy on Posting Copyrighted 2K Material,” *2K Games*, Dec. 16th, 2014, <http://support.2k.com/hc/en-us/articles/201335153-Policy-on-posting-copyrighted-2K-material>; “FAQ,” *RemedyGames*, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://remedygames.com/extra/faq/> [inactive]; “Policy on Posting Copyrighted Rockstar Games Material,” *Rockstar Games*, last modified on December 16th, 2014, 2012, accessed March 21st, 2015, <http://support.rockstargames.com/entries/21427003-policy-on-posting-copyright>

⁵⁵⁷ “End User License Agreement,” *Rockstar Games*, last modified on October 1st, 2013, accessed on March 21st, 2015, <http://www.rockstargames.com/eula>

Blurring of Boundaries Between Gameplay Commentary and the Game Industry

Aside from the industry's strategic encouragement of online gaming fans to create gameplay commentary videos using their copyrighted games while attempting to flexibly control their distribution, content, and monetization, many gameplay commentators on YouTube have also been incentivized to create video content by game companies through the strategic offering of monetary compensation in the form of sponsorship deals. This development exemplifies how the video-based incarnation of gameplay commentary has become increasingly commercialized as well as intertwined with the marketing practices of the game industry. As with the fanvid parodies of the preceding chapter, the increasing interconnection of gameplay commentary as a practice with a mass media industry and its marketing strategies undermines the idealistic vision of enhanced autonomy and independence from established media industries — a newfound form of freedom which is often attributed to amateur media creators and average citizens within Web 2.0. discourse. It also undercuts the constructed appearance of unmediated authenticity frequently implicitly ascribed within Web 2.0 rhetoric to user-generated content. Nevertheless, rather than being completely constrained by these commercial relationships with game publishers, YouTube-based gameplay commentators voluntarily choose to participate within them in the pursuit of financial gain. For instance, in his informal survey of 141 video game YouTubers who engage in gameplay commentary, Mike Rose determined that 40 % of the gameplay commentators surveyed with over 5, 000 subscribers on YouTube perceived these types of commercial relationships with game companies, especially if disclosed, as ethical and that 21 % of them did accept such offers.⁵⁵⁸ Rose would conclude that the higher the subscriber count for gameplay commentators, the higher chance they had of accepting such sponsorship deals with the industry.⁵⁵⁹ One such sponsorship program called Ronku, which is undertaken by publisher Electronic Arts (EA), enables — often with the help of free preview copies of the games to be performed and promoted — YouTube-based gameplay commentators who create videos about their games to receive a 10 to 15 \$ RPM (revenue per 1000 monetized impressions), which is significantly higher than the regular RPM they tend to already receive

⁵⁵⁸ Rose, “Pay for Play: The Ethics of Paying for YouTuber Coverage,” *Gamasutra*, July 11th, 2014, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/219671/Pay_for_Play_The_ethics_of_paying_for_YouTuber_coverage.php

⁵⁵⁹ Rose, “Pay for Play: The Ethics of Paying for YouTuber Coverage,” *Gamasutra*, July 11th, 2014, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/219671/Pay_for_Play_The_ethics_of_paying_for_YouTuber_coverage.php

from their partnership arrangements with Multi-Channel Networks and YouTube itself.⁵⁶⁰ However, such bonuses have a limit that stems from the marketing campaign's budget and the specific amount of views that a game publisher like EA chooses to purchase, which, in the case of its Ronku program, often turned out to be "tens of thousands of dollars of spending on each individual game" to be promoted.⁵⁶¹ EA's Ronku program describes itself as "an exclusive program powered by EA devoted to connecting top YouTube gamers directly with the people that make the games they love to play," thus presenting itself as an elite program that allows commentators to become closer to the game industry and the games they cherish within it.⁵⁶² This discursive promise functions to entice potential gameplay commentators on YouTube with a deep affection for the industry and its games to participate within the program and contribute their labour to it. Through this voluntary participation, EA attempts to channel the passionate type of immaterial relationships that the low-cost digital labour of gameplay commentators tends to cultivate with their viewers in the hope of converting it into additional sales of its game products. Under this program, sponsorship deals for EA games like *Battlefield 4* (2013) often compelled gameplay commentators to include marketing buzzwords and campaign-related hyperlinks in their video descriptions and forbade them from creating a video with a gameplay performance displaying game glitches.⁵⁶³ Despite this seeming deception, EA's program does require participating commentators to disclose their video's status as sponsored content within their video descriptions or as a visible banner.⁵⁶⁴ However, unlike the more visible and targeted advertising for game products that now accompanies gameplay commentary videos as pre-roll video ads and is directed to its passionate audience of gamers, these emerging types of sponsorship agreements between the game industry and gameplay commentators have made it more difficult for viewers to determine the degree of industry involvement within their content

⁵⁶⁰ Kyle Orland, "Electronic Arts also paying YouTubers to promote games," *Arts Technica*, last modified January 22nd, 2014, accessed January 27th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/electronic-arts-also-paying-youtubers-to-promote-games/>

⁵⁶¹ Kyle Orland, "Electronic Arts also paying YouTubers to promote games," *Arts Technica*, last modified January 22nd, 2014, accessed January 27th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/electronic-arts-also-paying-youtubers-to-promote-games/>

⁵⁶² "Welcome to Ronku," *Ronku*, accessed August 21st, 2017, <https://ronku.ea.com/?r=site/login>

⁵⁶³ Kyle Orland, "Electronic Arts also paying YouTubers to promote games," *Arts Technica*, last modified January 22nd, 2014, accessed January 27th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/electronic-arts-also-paying-youtubers-to-promote-games/>

⁵⁶⁴ Kyle Orland, "Electronic Arts also paying YouTubers to promote games," *Arts Technica*, last modified January 22nd, 2014, accessed January 27th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/electronic-arts-also-paying-youtubers-to-promote-games/>

because they are not always properly disclosed. As indicated earlier in this chapter, certain viewers perceive gameplay commentary videos on YouTube as being more authentic and independent alternatives to the marketing of the mainstream media industry and the writing of game critics within established outlets. Moreover, influenced by the YouTube platform's focus on enabling and encouraging the expression of the individual user through discourse and its open architecture, gameplay commentators themselves — as demonstrated earlier in this chapter — have reinforced this impression of greater authenticity by developing user tactics like the facecam and voice-over commentary recorded simultaneously during a performance — tactics that place the emphasis on the capture of a performer's unfiltered affective reactions and his or her spontaneous vocal responses to a game. Due to the seemingly unmediated and authentic quality of many gameplay commentary videos on YouTube, game publishers have strategically offered such sponsorship opportunities to their creators in order to transform them into influencers who can transmit positive affects and impressions about their properties to viewers and thus stimulate additional purchases. Furthermore, mutually benefiting from such sponsorship deals with gameplay commentators on YouTube and often acting as intermediaries for them are gaming-focused MCNs on the platform like Machinima Inc. For instance, within its media kit for potential advertisers, YouTube-based MCN Machinima Inc. even encourages them to take advantage of the sponsorship and native advertising opportunities afforded by the large and passionate audience accumulated by their partnered commentators and openly offered by the MCN itself.⁵⁶⁵

In early 2014, public controversy would surface over the occasionally invisible commercial involvement of game companies within the production of gameplay commentary videos by players through the above sponsorship arrangements. More specifically, it arose when confusing language in a sponsorship deal involving Machinima Inc. and the promotion of games for Microsoft's Xbox One console seemed to suggest that participating gameplay commentators could not disclose the sponsored status of their content and needed to speak neutrally about the previewed games within it.⁵⁶⁶ According to a Machinima email, one incarnation of this Microsoft

⁵⁶⁵ "Media Kit," *Machinima*, accessed July 20th, 2016, https://www.machinima.com/media/MediaKit_11-2014.pdf [inactive]

⁵⁶⁶ Kyle Orland, "Stealth Marketing: Microsoft Paying Off YouTubers for Xbox One Mentions," *Ars Technica*, last modified on January 21st, 2014, accessed on January 26th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/stealth-marketing-microsoft-paying-youtubers-for-xbox-one-mentions/>

deal offered a 3 \$ RPM bonus to participating commentators and had a cap at 1.25 million views, which resulted in a budget of 3, 750 \$.⁵⁶⁷ However, once the cap for this deal was met, Microsoft no longer had to pay commentators that rate for any additional views — a detail that highlights the significant value that game publishers and game console manufacturers receive from such sponsorship programs. In March 2016, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reached a settlement with Machinima Inc. over this sponsorship campaign and, more specifically, the payment of 30, 000 \$ to YouTube commentators in order for them to say positive things about Xbox One games without disclosing their role as sponsors.⁵⁶⁸ More recently, Warner Bros caught similar criticism from players over sponsorship deals with gameplay commentators to promote its game *Middle of Earth: Shadows of Mordor* (2014) — deals whose contracts required the player to “promote a positive sentiment about the game,” avoid in-game glitches, include links to purchase the game, speak about some of the game's key features, and give the company final approval of the video 48 hours before it is uploaded.⁵⁶⁹ Once again, the FTC would settle charges against Warner Bros for failing to properly instruct and compel participating commentators — who were paid "hundreds to tens of thousands of dollars" each — to properly include explicit disclosures within the produced videos rather than hiding them within the less visible section of their description boxes.⁵⁷⁰ Moreover, while copies of games are often offered to content creators by companies, YouTube-based gameplay commentator Ohmwrecker has asserted that, in order to receive games for their videos prior to their official commercial release in order to create commented previews of them, it is often necessary to accept a sponsorship deal involving one of these games as well as its varying conditions.⁵⁷¹ Although some of its more offensive

⁵⁶⁷ Kyle Orland, “Stealth Marketing: Microsoft Paying Off YouTubers for Xbox One Mentions,” *Ars Technica*, last modified on January 21st, 2014, accessed on January 26th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/01/stealth-marketing-microsoft-paying-youtubers-for-xbox-one-mentions/>

⁵⁶⁸ Owen S. Good, "Machinima Settles Deceptive Advertising Complaint Brought by FTC," *Polygon*, March 19th, 2016, <http://www.polygon.com/2016/3/19/11268322/machinima-settles-deceptive-advertising-complaint-brought-by-ftc>

⁵⁶⁹ Nathan Grayson, “The Messy Story Behind YouTubers Taking Money for Game Coverage,” *Kotaku*, October 8th, 2014, <http://kotaku.com/the-messy-story-behind-youtubers-taking-money-for-game-1644092214>

⁵⁷⁰ Todd Spangler, "Warner Bros. Settles FTC Charges Over PewDiePie Sponsored Game Videos," *Variety*, July 11th, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/digital/news/warner-bros-pewdiepie-ftc-1201811908/>; "Warner Bros. Settles FTC Charges It Failed to Adequately Disclose It Paid Online Influencers to Post Gameplay Videos," *Federal Trade Commission*, July 11th, 2016, <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2016/07/warner-bros-settles-ftc-charges-it-failed-adequately-disclose-it>

⁵⁷¹ Nathan Grayson, “The Messy Story Behind YouTubers Taking Money for Game Coverage,” *Kotaku*, October 8th, 2014, <http://kotaku.com/the-messy-story-behind-youtubers-taking-money-for-game-1644092214>

stipulations can occasionally be negotiated away according to Ohmwrecker,⁵⁷² the compulsion of commentators on YouTube to acquiesce to the conditions of a sponsorship deal in order to acquire early copies of upcoming game releases reveal the power that the game industry holds to exploit their widespread desire to monetize gameplay commentary videos for financial gain as a means to control their creative agency and the content that results from it. In addition, by not properly compelling participating commentators to disclose their status as paid influencers, game companies can better tap into the passion and trust that fans invest in their seemingly authentic videos and potentially stimulate more game sales from what appears to be an unbiased endorsement. Participating MCNs, for their part, benefit from the additional ad revenue acquired from such sponsorship arrangements and their further commodification of the attention-based and affective relationships that gameplay commentators have cultivated with their fannish audiences. Like the EULAs, video policies, and hardware platform affordances described earlier, these sponsorship deals are thus another strategy within communicative capitalism's supporting disciplinary apparatus of power through which game companies and MCNs as intermediating participants within these deals strive to enable and encourage the creative agency and subjectivity of online media creators like gameplay commentators while also flexibly controlling its output by determining the parameters within which it can manifest. This additional strategy of flexible control enacted through contractual sponsorship agreements between gameplay commentators and game companies once again significantly undercuts the idealistic image of unmediated independence and unencumbered empowerment often implicitly ascribed to the creators of user-generated social media content within discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm. It specifically undermines this misleading representation by revealing another manner in which already established and emerging media corporations like game companies and MCNs can control and shape the creative agency driving the commentators' labour as mediating influences in an attempt to profitably channel its various products including the vast and passionate audience relationships that their video content produces. As a result of the above strategies and the substantial amount of control they afford to game companies and MCNs over the practice of gameplay commentary on YouTube, an asymmetrical power relation is often formed between them and commentators wherein the latter, while still holding some degree of tactical and

⁵⁷² Nathan Grayson, "The Messy Story Behind YouTubers Taking Money for Game Coverage," *Kotaku*, October 8th, 2014, <http://kotaku.com/the-messy-story-behind-youtubers-taking-money-for-game-1644092214>

creative autonomy and having the potential to be financially empowered by some of these strategies, are still substantially constrained and restricted by them.

Although this power asymmetry can often emerge between gameplay commentators and game companies within the sponsorship deals detailed in the previous paragraph in spite of the new monetization options and the potential for financial empowerment they afford to commentators, in other cases, some more popular gameplay commentators have acquired such a large audience on YouTube that they can exploit their fans' affective attachment to them and their content and create their own sponsorship programs for these companies. Within these alternative promotional arrangements, by offering companies access to this large passionate audience of fans in exchange for some form of compensation, these more popular commentators are occasionally able to set the terms of their commercial partnerships with game companies. While such alternative relations are demonstrative of the constituent power that lies at the core of gameplay commentators' digital labour, they also reveal the capacity of certain commentators and Let's Players to actually be substantively empowered by Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube and to adopt contract-based strategies of control similar to that of the game industry that embody their acquisition of power and enact power relations with often smaller, independent game developers and publishers. Exemplifying this rare occurrence in 2014, the British gameplay commentary group Yogscast would create its own sponsorship program called Yogdiscovery and offered its services to smaller indie developers like Keen Software House. By participating in this sponsorship program, Yogscast took a small cut of the sales of Keen Software House's game *Space Engineers* (2013) for a limited time in exchange for the game being featured within their very popular commentary videos.⁵⁷³ This latter example underlines how the power relations that emerge between commentators and game developers are not always uni-directional and commentators themselves can take advantage of their accumulated audience in order to attract smaller game developers and publishers in need of exposure into participating in their sponsorship programs and forfeiting a cut of their sales. Further exemplifying the potential of popular gameplay commentators to abuse the power they have acquired as a result of the

⁵⁷³ Paul Tassi, "The Pay-For-Coverage YouTube Debate Seems Pretty Clear Cut," *Forbes*, July 16th, 2014, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2014/07/16/the-pay-for-coverage-youtube-debate-seems-pretty-clear-cut/>; Mike Rose, "YouTubers Yogscast taking Revenue Share to Promote Space Engineers," *Gamasutra*, July 14th, 2014, accessed Sept. 19th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/220950/YouTubers_Yogscast_taking_revenue_share_to_promote_Space_Engineers.php

audience they have built, commentators like SeaNanners and TheSyndicateProject with larger fanbases were caught misleading fans into thinking that their positive reactions to games like Section Studios' *Dead Realm* (2015) were independent and unbiased when, in reality, they had a financial stake in their creation and sale.⁵⁷⁴ Without proper disclosure, these commentators were profitably exploiting the trust and affection that their fans invested in them—an affective relationship reinforced by the sense of proximity and authenticity cultivated by commentator tactics like live commentary, facecams, and online chat interactions along with the contemporaneous discourse about the greater independence from already established mass media industries afforded to amateur media creators on Web 2.0 platforms. The affective attachment that is formed between popular gameplay commentators and their viewers ultimately renders them more vulnerable to the misleading surface appearance of independence and authenticity presented by a commentator as well as the positive affect and emotions about a game that this non-transparent promotional content often seeks to transmit. Thus, the most popular gameplay commentators can sometimes exert a considerable amount of power due to the large audience of passionate viewers they accumulate and develop their own strategies to control and exploit other smaller game companies and their own fanbases. In spite of these exceptions, the majority of sponsorship and promotional deals on YouTube are orchestrated by publishers and MCNs and, taking advantage of the power often afforded to them within such contracts, these strategies allow them to significantly shape and control the content of gameplay commentary videos to their primary benefit, thus frequently cultivating an asymmetrical power relationship with their creators. Although gameplay commentators are increasingly becoming significantly imbricated within the increasingly commercial strategies of social media entities and game companies, it should be noted that they do retain some degree of tactical agency when it comes to fulfilling the conditions of a sponsorship deal, choosing which deal to accept, or negotiating its terms. In addition, even though they predominantly benefit game companies, MCNs, and YouTube itself, many commentators willingly accept these advertising-dependent sponsorship strategies because they tend to give them access to early game copies prior to their release or due to the boost in ad revenue that they offer. In other words, the creative agency behind the labour

⁵⁷⁴ Alex Wawro, "Dead Realm Publisher Disregards FTC Disclosure Guidelines for YouTubes," Gamasutra, August 19th, 2015, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/251650/Dead_Realm_publisher_disregards_FTC_disclosure_guidelines_for_Youtubers.php

of commentators is never fully and deterministically controlled and integrated within these particular marketing and monetization strategies of external game companies and MCNs. As exemplified by Yogscast's Yogdiscovery program, this always persistent degree of tactical autonomy and the constituent power that it embodies can even lead certain gameplay commentators to form and shape their own commercial arrangements with game developers.

Multi-Channel Networks and the Commercialization of Gameplay Commentary

More dominant and reflective of the commercialization of gameplay commentary than the emergence of such sponsorship arrangements is the increasing integration of gameplay commentators within the partnership programs of YouTube-based MCNs, several of which actively seek to accumulate user-generated gaming content like gameplay commentary videos and have their brand image significantly revolve around it. For instance, in 2007, Machinima Inc. created one of the first gaming-focused MCNs on YouTube devoted to machinima films and gaming-related content.⁵⁷⁵ From 2009 onwards, however, the network's main channels increasingly drew on gameplay commentary videos of first person shooter games. During July 2016, this network's official and user-generated programming had purportedly acquired over 500 million subscribers.⁵⁷⁶ By cultivating a large audience, Machinima Inc. sought to sell ad units to advertisers that predominantly focus on gaming, movies, technology, and television.⁵⁷⁷ However, despite this dependence on ads, former CEO Allen DeBevoise distinguished the MCN from television in terms of how it “embrace[s] the user-generated community” and empowers it.⁵⁷⁸ This type of communal framing echoes the contemporaneous discourse about the Web 2.0 paradigm and social media platforms like YouTube, which was described in previous chapters,

⁵⁷⁵ Dawn C. Chmielewski, “YouTube Video-game Channel Machinima,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 24th, 2012, accessed April 4th, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/24/business/la-fi-ct-machinima-20120124>

⁵⁷⁶ “Advertise: Overview,” *Machinima*, accessed July 18th, 2016, <http://www.machinima.com/advertise/#overview> [inactive]

⁵⁷⁷ To see statements of this desire to generate revenue through ad unit sales by Machinima Inc. and its representatives, see Allen Debevoise, “Allen Debevoise [sic] CEO, Machinima: Video Advertising and Monetization,” YouTube video, 4:11, posted by “reelSEO,” Jan 02, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6buT1zE_Vew&feature=player_embedded; Mike Shields, “Machinima Adventures of a Digital Content Company,” *Ad Week*, April 3rd, 2012, accessed April 8th, 2012, <http://www.adweek.com/news/technology/machinima-adventures-digital-content-company-139319?page=2>; Sarah Lacy, “Machinima: The Most Impressive LA Tech Company since Myspace,” February 1st, 2011, accessed April 5th, 2012, <http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/01/machinima-the-most-impressive-la-tech-company-since-myspace/>; Andy Plessner, “Machinima Claims 127 Million Video Views – Grabs \$ 9 Million in Venture Round for Platform Expansion,” Beet TV video, 2:28, posted on July 12th, 2010, <http://www.beet.tv/2010/07/machinima.html>

⁵⁷⁸ Allen Debevoise, “Why Machinima.com is a YouTube success,” YouTube video, 8:22, posted by “forbes,” May 25th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I4ltPYeHeE&feature=related>

in that it similarly masks Machinima Inc.'s commercial focus on partnering user channels in order to build a larger audience and profit from the monetization of its attention. With this goal in mind, according to its website's "About" page in July 2016, Machinima Inc. had partnered over 30,000 YouTube channels or "programmers" with which they share a portion of the ad revenue received from their viewership.⁵⁷⁹ Most of these channels produce gameplay commentary videos. According to DeBevoise within publications from 2011 and 2012 by writers like Sarah Lacy and Mike Shields along with a now defunct video interview by Agility Inc., gameplay commentary videos were accepted and tolerated by media companies including game publishers specifically because they drew in the desired male demographic — or audience commodity — receptive to their ad campaigns while often promoting games themselves.⁵⁸⁰ Partially embodying the more flexible and inclusive mode of neoliberal capitalism espoused by Dean and the apparatus that supports it, the strategic approach of MCNs native to YouTube like Machinima Inc. and their partnership programs is to include and channel the often affect-driven free labour of gameplay commentators rather than attempt to fully control it. The ultimately goal of this strategy of inclusion is to benefit and potentially profit from the affective and attention-based audience relationships that these commentators cultivate with the viewers of their content.

YouTube-based MCNs' inclusive and seemingly collaborative strategy when it comes to flexibly controlling gameplay commentators and channeling the immaterial products of their labour is also directly felt in the partnership programs that they offer. Within these arrangements, partners with YouTube MCNs are paid a portion of the ad revenue for each 1000 monetized views known as RPM (revenue per impressions) or through percentage-based revenue sharing agreements. More specifically, Google takes 45 % of the ad revenue accumulated from the viewership numbers for the user content of a partnered channel owner while MCNs like Machinima Inc. then distribute the remaining 55 % of this revenue between this partnered user and themselves.⁵⁸¹ This distribution of the remaining percentage of accumulated ad revenue,

⁵⁷⁹ "About," *Machinima*, accessed July 18th, 2016, <http://www.machinima.com/about-us/>

⁵⁸⁰ See Sarah Lacy, "Machinima: The Most Impressive LA Tech Company since Myspace," February 1st, 2011, accessed April 5th, 2012, <http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/01/machinima-the-most-impressive-la-tech-company-since-myspace/>; Mike Shields, "Machinima Adventures of a Digital Content Company," *Ad Week*, April 3rd, 2012, accessed April 8th, 2012, <http://www.adweek.com/news/technology/machinima-adventures-digital-content-company-139319?page=3>; Allen Debevoise, "Brands are the New Publishers – Interview with Allen DeBevoise," YouTube Video, 2:14, posted by "AgilityIncVideo," March 11th, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVeXOxNg_S0 [inactive]

⁵⁸¹ Tim Peterson, "YouTube TV Sweetheart Ad Deals," *Ad Age*, October 31st, 2013, accessed on January 25th, 2014, <http://adage.com/article/digital/youtube-tv-sweetheart-ad-deals/245019/>

however, varies considerably depending on the specific MCN contract that partners sign and it can change over time. For instance, while details about these partnership contracts are often difficult to discover due to the non-disclosure agreements that tend to accompany them, in 2012, Machinima partners were reportedly offered roughly 2 \$ per 1000 monetized views of their content.⁵⁸² In contrast, other MCNs like Polaris, TGN, Fullscreen, and Curse have different agreements. For instance, gameplay commentator Ohmwrecker was offered a revenue share of 60/40 by Polaris where 60 % of the remaining ad revenue not already taken by Google was amassed by him.⁵⁸³ On its official twitter account in 2013, the gaming-focused MCN named TGN would also claim that, of the ad revenue not collected by Google, its Partner contract offers a revenue split of 60 % for the partner while the remaining 40 % would go to the MCN's owner BroadbandTV Corp (BBTV).⁵⁸⁴ Another former group of gameplay commentators with the partnered channel Bro Team Pill managed to negotiate a 80/20 split of the remaining ad revenue on their videos with Machinima Inc.⁵⁸⁵ On the alternative platform Twitch, which is dedicated to the livestreaming of gameplay commentary, William A. Hamilton, Oliver Garretson, and Andruid Kerne have stated that streaming gameplay commentators receive “between 2 and 5 USD per 1000 impressions” in RPM for the ads on their broadcasts within the site's partnership program and they receive half of all monthly 4.99 \$ subscriptions, which their viewers pay in exchange for platform perks.⁵⁸⁶ Many online users seeking to make gameplay commentary their full-time job often take part in the partnership programs available on both YouTube and Twitch, often editing and converting livestreamed content into monetizable videos for their YouTube audience in order to more securely fund their livelihood.

Moreover, besides these partnerships and revenue sharing agreements, YouTube's Content ID filtering system detailed in the previous chapter also has a role in the distribution of

⁵⁸² Carla Marshall, “What it Takes to Make a Living from YouTube's Partner Earnings,” *Reelseo*, October 2013, accessed on January 24th, 2014, <http://www.reelseo.com/youtube-partner-earnings/>

⁵⁸³ Ohmwrecker, “MCN Follow-Up – Content ID, & the Greedy MCNs,” YouTube video, 22:49, posted by “MaskedGamer,” December 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2gswdiH3VE>

⁵⁸⁴ TGN Gamers (@tgntv), “In the Partner Contract, revenue split is 60% (partner) / 40% (BBTV). TGN doesn't take a cut,” Twitter, January 15th, 2013, 10:27 A.M., <https://twitter.com/tgntv/status/291250204982771712?lang=en>

⁵⁸⁵ BroTeam, “This is how Machinima Hurt My Trusting Boyhole,” *Broteampill.tumblr.com*, August 17th, 2014, <http://broteampill.tumblr.com/post/94968691996/this-is-how-machinima-hurt-my-trusting-boyhole>

⁵⁸⁶ William A. Hamilton, Oliver Garretson, and Andruid Kerne, “Streaming on Twitch: Fostering Participatory Communities of Play within Live Mixed Media,” in *CHI '14 Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: ACM, 2014), 1316, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557048>.

ad revenue between commentators and media companies because it monitors the site's content for copyrighted material and, if a match is found, automatically claims the video and gives its creator's portion of the ad revenue to the supposed copyright holder of the appropriated material regardless of the user's input.⁵⁸⁷ As will be illustrated later in this chapter, game companies, through Content ID, hold the capacity to capture the remaining portion of the ad revenue usually accumulated by the user creators of gameplay commentary videos and MCNs through their exercise of proprietary control over the copyrighted game content they appropriate. Supporting this Content ID system and the financial benefits it affords to MCNs, game companies, and Google, YouTube actively allows the monetization of gameplay footage within a section of the site devoted to the user appropriation of game content entitled "Video Game and Software Content" if it is accompanied by informative or instructional commentary and monetization rights are granted within the license agreement of the appropriated game.⁵⁸⁸

Complementing this push towards a more inclusive strategic approach to profitably channeling the attention-based and affective audience relationships produced by the labour of gameplay commentators — a strategy that is part of the larger apparatus and mode of flexible control supporting communicative capitalism — in August 2015, YouTube also created and launched a livestreaming platform, hub, and app called YouTube Gaming that aggregates game-related content like gameplay commentary videos and facilitates real-time streaming spectatorship for creators and users as a means to compete with rival live-streaming platform Twitch.⁵⁸⁹ More recently, YouTube Gaming has started to allow users to enlist in 3.99 \$ monthly subscriptions or 'Sponsorships' associated with a select amount of creators in order to directly sponsor their work and receive a few limited perks like chat sessions exclusive to subscribers and a chat badge selected by the a gameplay commentator.⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, because streamers are more

⁵⁸⁷ For a description of this system and how it functions, see Paul McDonald, "Digital Discords in the Online Media Economy: Advertising versus Content versus Copyright," *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 392; Mary Erickson and Janet Wasko, "The Political Economy of Youtube," *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau. (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 374, 379-380

⁵⁸⁸ "Video Game and Software Content," *Youtube*, accessed March 23rd, 2015, <http://support.google.com/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=138161>

⁵⁸⁹ Stuart Dredge, "Google launches YouTube Gaming to challenge Amazon-owned Twitch," *The Guardian*, August 26th, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/aug/26/youtube-gaming-live-website-apps>; Chris Foxx, "YouTube Gaming launch poses challenge to Twitch," *BBC*, August 26th, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34015600>

⁵⁹⁰ For descriptions of this new gaming-focused platform feature, see "Sponsor a YouTube Gaming Channel," *Google*, accessed March 27th, 2016, <https://support.google.com/youtubegaming/answer/6304294?hl=en>; Samit

likely to benefit from Twitch's subscription-sponsorship system for channels with its higher 4.99 \$ cost, YouTube has foregrounded YouTube Gaming's one key difference from Twitch, which is that the monetization contracts for their partnership program do not include a "exclusivity clause that prevents partners from livestreaming any gaming or gaming-related content on other platforms, such as YouTube."⁵⁹¹ Through this new sponsorship option for spectators of live-streamed gameplay commentary, YouTube has communicated to the *Los Angeles Times* that they will take a "minor cut of sponsorship dollars," although the exact portion of the 3.99 \$ monthly subscription has not been disclosed by the platform.⁵⁹² Regardless, YouTube Gaming further reflects the platform's increasing shift towards the encouragement of gameplay commentary and its attempt to profitably channel the various forms of value produced by commentators including the large amount of affect and attention that fans invest in them and their content. Moreover, YouTube Gaming and these platform features embody, as detailed by Schäfer in the introduction with his concept of implicit participation, the tendency of Web 2.0 platforms and their design choices to increasingly anticipate and integrate the participatory activity and labour of online users in order to benefit from the social, affective, and relational products it produces — or what Hardt and Negri have previously termed the common.

Thus, in contrast to the non-profit fanvid parodies of the previous chapter, YouTube and its corporate partners do little to discourage this appropriation-based practice. Moreover, as noted by Mark Andrejevic, YouTube's Content ID system in combination with its data mining ultimately exploits the immaterial labour of its users to the primary benefit of itself and its media partners.⁵⁹³ However, problematizing this narrative of pure exploitation, gameplay commentators can often benefit substantially from these partnerships with MCNs and Google through the ad revenue that they do receive. For instance, some commentators like RadBrad, PewDiePie,

Sarkar, "YouTube Gaming adds mobile livestreaming and Twitch-like paid subscriptions," *Polygon*, October 15th, 2015, <http://www.polygon.com/2015/10/15/9537071/youtube-gaming-sponsorships-subscriptions-android-mobile-livestreaming-twitch-google>; Adi Robertson, "YouTube Gaming adds live Android streaming and paid subscriptions," *The Verge*, October 15th, 2015, <http://www.theverge.com/2015/10/15/9539971/youtube-gaming-android-streaming-sponsorship>

⁵⁹¹ Samit Sarkar, "YouTube Gaming adds mobile livestreaming and Twitch-like paid subscriptions," *Polygon*, October 15th, 2015, <http://www.polygon.com/2015/10/15/9537071/youtube-gaming-sponsorships-subscriptions-android-mobile-livestreaming-twitch-google>

⁵⁹² Dave Paresh, "YouTube Seek Game-Fan Fees," *Los Angeles Times*, October 15th, 2015, accessed March 31st, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-1016-youtube-sponsorships-20151016-story.html>

⁵⁹³ Mark Andrejevic, "Exploiting Youtube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour," *The Youtube Reader*, eds. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 415, 416-419.

SeaNanners, and TotalBiscuit obtain a significant enough audience that they can financially support themselves with their ad revenue and make gameplay commentary their careers.⁵⁹⁴ Similarly, by accumulating enough money and viewers, PewDiePie would leverage his popularity and financial power to help form and co-create the subnetwork RevelMode with Maker Studios.⁵⁹⁵ Likewise, besides funding their own games, commentators SeaNanners and TheSyndicateProject have also used their own accumulated capital and popularity to create and promote JetPak, an alternative Multi-Channel Network that claims to offer the promotional services typically promised by MCNs without taking any percentage cut of ad revenue from partnered commentators who instead pay a subscription fee.⁵⁹⁶ Gameplay commentary on YouTube thus distinguishes itself from other appropriation-based and fan-driven forms of user-generated media content because it is tactically commercialized by its practitioners with the approval of MCNs, Google, and most copyright owners of the games appropriated and, as a result of this process, commentators can gain a relative degree of power. The occasionally beneficial commercialization of gameplay commentary thus subverts the perception of social media creators as being in an oppositional relationship with the commercial strategies of already established media industries or of being fully captured by them.

The Attraction and Constraints of MCN Partnerships for Gameplay Commentators

However, despite voluntarily entering into these mutually beneficial arrangements with the various media actors associated with YouTube and other social media platforms, gameplay commentators, nevertheless, often lack a considerable degree of control over the products of their labour, the revenue they gain from it, and their ability to speak openly about either. This state of affairs is the result of the asymmetrical power relations that they tend to hold with

⁵⁹⁴ Due to the novelty of the form of play-based financial empowerment often experienced by these more successful and popular gameplay commentators, interviews and profile pieces have often been undertaken with them. See Michelle Lanz, "How gamer 'The Rad Brad' makes a living playing video games," *The Frame*, August 29th, 2014, <http://www.scpr.org/programs/the-frame/2014/08/29/39119/how-gamer-the-rad-brad-makes-a-living-playing-vide/>; Anika Chin, "'Seananners' and the Art of Video Game Commentary," *CNN*, May 7th, 2012, accessed January 22nd, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/04/tech/gaming-gadgets/adam-montoya-seananners/>; Will Porter, "The Cult of TotalBiscuit," *Eurogamer*, November 14th, 2012, <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2012-11-14-the-cult-of-totalbiscuit>; Danny Wadson, "Gamertube: Pewdiepie and the YouTube Commentary Revolution," *Polygon*, September 6th, 2013, <http://www.polygon.com/features/2013/9/6/4641320/pewdiepie-youtube-commentary>

⁵⁹⁵ Todd Spangler, "PewDiePie Launches 'Revelmode' Network," *Variety*, January 13th, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/digital/news/pewdiepie-revelmode-network-1201678900/>

⁵⁹⁶ "3BlackDot Launches Jetpak, The Alternative Multi-Channel Network," *PR Newswire*, Nov. 6th, 2014, accessed July 14th, 2016, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/3blackdot-launches-jetpak-the-alternative-multi-channel-network-281772471.html>

MCNs, Google, and game companies, relations whose details are often hidden behind the non-disclosure agreements that they are forced to sign. The lack of transparency over most of these partnership arrangements with MCNs and their revenue splits often renders gameplay commentators ignorant of the possibility of more beneficial terms and thus unable to negotiate them. Furthermore, it also tends to mask the unequal amount of control and rights accorded to MCNs over commentators within these contracts and, by extension, the power asymmetry they frequently cultivate. For instance, according to a *Village Voice* report by Tessa Stuart, on May 8th 2012, partner Ben Vacas (Braindeadly) uploaded a video disclosing and criticizing an unfair partnership contract that seemingly transferred the rights to the monetization of his channel's content to Machinima Inc. in perpetuity.⁵⁹⁷ Due to their lack of expertise in legal matters and the promise of turning play into an empowering profession, partners like Vacas often only later come to realize the rights to their content and its monetization that they had forfeited to an MCN. Besides the power exerted over gameplay commentators by MCNs within partnership contracts, these amateur creators are also highly vulnerable to other displays of power and control by MCNs. For instance, in response to a new MCN contract, Ross Scott, the creator of the Let's Play-styled machinima series *Freeman's Mind* (2007), publicly criticized the excessive amount of control over his content that this contract would give Machinima Inc., accused the latter MCN of forcibly claiming ownership of his videos based on a non-existent contract, and condemned the monetization of his videos on the alternative media platform Blip TV without his consent or awareness and without offering him his respective share of the ad revenue.⁵⁹⁸ Other competing MCNs like Curse have sought to position themselves against these more typical forms of constraints. For instance, within Curse's "Union for Gamers" program, a 90 % share of the remaining revenue is promised after Google takes its cut, partners are offered contracts into which they are not locked and about which they do not have to be confidential, and, lastly, the monetization of partner content on a user channel is not the exclusive right of Curse.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Tessa Stuart, "'Rage Against the Machinima,'" *Village Voice*, January 9th, 2013, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2013-01-09/news/rage-against-the-machinima/>

⁵⁹⁸ Ross Scott, "Escape from Machinima," *Accursed Farms*, last modified on May 4th, 2013, accessed on January 27th, 2014, <http://www.accursedfarms.com/escape-from-machinima/>; Ross Scott, "Escape from Machinima (Part 2)," *Accursed Farms*, last modified on January 8th, 2014, accessed January 27th, 2014, <http://www.accursedfarms.com/escape-from-machinima-part-2/>

⁵⁹⁹ "Partner Features," *Curse*, accessed January 24th, 2014, <http://www.unionforgamers.com/partner-features>

Despite these few alternatives, gameplay commentators are often attracted into entering into these fraught relationships with MCNs through the latter's strategic use of affectively charged discourse situating the labour of potential partners within the realm of play and games as well as their utopian promise of personal empowerment to potential partners. This promise echoes the claims found within Web 2.0 discourse in general, but it also more specifically complements the affectively attractive utopian vision of play-based empowerment that Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube tend to construct for their users — an affective-discursive strategy intended to encourage further online participation and is a key part of communicative capitalism's emerging apparatus of control. This discursive strategy tends to privilege an individualistic and neoliberal conception of participation and empowerment akin to the one that, according to Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi in their work, both supports and is a product of capitalistic power structures — a form of participation that, they argue, needs to be further recognized within the numerous contexts in which it manifests itself.⁶⁰⁰ For instance, referencing the iconography of militaristic first person shooters, sci fi space operas, and superhero narratives, the partnership page on Machinima Inc.'s website in April 2015 compelled potential partners to join and “up your game” through rhetoric that similarly frames them as an individualistic and legendary superheroes or soldiers enlisting into their program and participating within it as if on a game-like quest.⁶⁰¹ In addition, the MCN known as TGN in the 2015 and 2016 incarnations of its partnership webpage invites potential partners to “break into the game” and frames its partnership program as a community that will reinforce their gamer identity and cultural capital while empowering them into new careers.⁶⁰² Once attracted into these partnerships with YouTube MCNs by this play-centric and empowering discourse and its masking of the power relations that inform them, gameplay commentators' labour and right to benefit from its products become increasingly vulnerable to the impositions and constraints of emergent commercial forces like MCNs. Counter to the idealistic empowerment narrative of Web 2.0 discourse and

⁶⁰⁰ Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi. “Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation,” *The Communication Review* 14 (2011): 180-181, 190-193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2011.597245>.

⁶⁰¹ “First! Many2Many Programming Service for Fandom and Gamer Culture,” *Machinima*, accessed April 1st, 2015, <http://www.machinima.com>

⁶⁰² “Break into the Game,” *TGN*, accessed April 1st, 2015, <http://partnership.tgn.tv>; “Become a TGN Partner,” *TGN*, accessed July 19th, 2016, <http://partnership.tgn.tv>

MCNs, partnership agreements with entities like Machinima Inc. hold the potential to disempower the gameplay commentators who use YouTube.

The Disempowering Effects of YouTube's Copyright Systems on Commentators

Although many gameplay commentators voluntarily enter into agreements with MCNs aware of their flaws, restrictions, and misleading promises, the persistently minimal degree of control and ownership that they have over their work within similar arrangements has been compounded in recent years by attempts to expand the scope of copyright law and by Google's distinctive approach to enforcing it through Content ID. This threat recently re-emerged in the form of the Stop Online Piracy Act and the Protect Intellectual Property Act, two pieces of legislation shaped in 2011 to criminalize the unauthorized streaming of copyrighted content and offer tools to block services and access to infringing sites.⁶⁰³ In conjunction with the multitude of responses to these bills from websites covering the game industry,⁶⁰⁴ gameplay commentators like TotalBiscuit and DSPGaming encouraged, through uploaded videos, their audience to participate in campaigns against the supporters of these measures.⁶⁰⁵ Despite these tactics, copyright concerns constantly appear among commentators, particularly in response to the platform's Content ID and copyright enforcement systems. While a compromise with copyright law intended to preserve the predominantly inclusive character of the platform's architecture, these systems still accord a disproportionate amount of power to game companies and are occasionally appropriated by some of them in order to silence criticism from gameplay commentators or to profit from the ad revenue that their video content tends to accumulate. For instance, in the case of Totalbiscuit, his video critiques of the games *Day One: Garry's Incident* (2013) and *Guise of the Wolf* (2014) were taken down via copyright strikes imposed by their game developers.⁶⁰⁶ Siva Vaidhyanathan, in his critical analysis of Google platforms, has

⁶⁰³ Stop Online Piracy Act, H.R. 3261, 112th Cong. (2011); Protect IP Act, Senate Bill 968, 112th Cong. (2011).

⁶⁰⁴ Yochai Benkler, Hal Roberts, Robert Faris, and Alicia Solow-Niederman, and Bruce Etling, "Social Mobilization and the Networked Public Sphere: Mapping the SOPA-PIPA Debate," *Political Communication* 32, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2015): 609-610. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.986349>

⁶⁰⁵ For examples of this resistance to such legislation from gameplay commentators, see Phil Burnell (DSPGaming), "ALERT: Protect IP Bill is WORSE than S.978 and being RUSHED," YouTube Video, 26:21, posted by "DSPGaming," October 27th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAtSfNh9B0c>; John Bain (TotalBiscuit), "WTF is SOPA? Aka the American Government trying to ruin the internet," YouTube video, 21:12, posted by "TotalBiscuit," December 17th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhwuXNv8fJM>

⁶⁰⁶ See John Bain (TotalBiscuit), "This Video is No Longer Available: The Day One Garry's Incident Incident," Youtube video, 14:11, posted by TotalBiscuit," October 20th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfgoDDh4kE0>; Steven Bogos, "Guise of the Wolf Dev Takes Down Negative YouTube Review," *The Escapist*, February 26th, 2014, accessed Sept. 19th, 2014,

foregrounded how the content filtering and copyright enforcement systems of YouTube, in their attempt to better satisfy the DMCA's notice and takedown requirements, can potentially undertake this type of censorship when it comes to user-generated content engaging in fair use criticism and commentary and thus accord too much power to the copyright claimant.⁶⁰⁷

Conversely, adopting a less restrictive and more flexible strategy than the above companies, but one still rooted in control, in May 2013, Nintendo took advantage of YouTube's Content ID system in order to claim gameplay commentary videos using its content with the intention of extracting their ad revenue for themselves.⁶⁰⁸ This reaction from Nintendo was initially viewed by several commentators as an attack against the livelihood of fans affectively promoting their content, an abuse of copyright law's purview over static copies, and a means of exploiting the labour of others for profit.⁶⁰⁹ Later on, Nintendo would relent and reveal a more inclusive affiliate-focused partnership program designed to offer a revenue sharing agreement to commentators who “wish to use the material more proactively.”⁶¹⁰ Framing itself against its more prohibitionist past relations with gameplay commentators, Nintendo's new and seemingly more inclusive program reflected the more flexible strategies of control over user labour and its immaterial products emerging within the twenty first century neoliberal paradigm of communicative capitalism and the Web 2.0 platforms that increasingly embody it. Unveiled in January 2015, the Nintendo Creators Program promised to include and enable gameplay

<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/132262-Guise-of-the-Wolf-Dev-Takes-Down-Negative-YouTube-Review-Update-2>

⁶⁰⁷ Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 37-38.

⁶⁰⁸ Chris Kohler, “Nintendo's YouTube Ad-Grab is Playing with Fire,” *Wired*, last modified on May 16th, 2013, accessed on January 26th, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/gamelifelife/2013/05/nintendo-youtube-lets-play/>; “Nintendo to Profit from User Videos Posted to YouTube,” *BBC News*, last modified on May 16th, 2013, accessed on January 26th, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-22552756>

⁶⁰⁹ For a sample of these types of reactions to Nintendo's attempt to channel the productivity of gameplay commentators for profit, see Ryan Rigney, “For Chuggaaconroy, Playing Old Nintendo Games is a Full-Time Job,” *Wired*, last modified on July 27th, 2013, accessed January 22nd 2014, <http://www.wired.com/gamelifelife/2013/07/chuggaaconroy/>; Zack Scott, “Thoughts on Nintendo Claiming Let's Plays (Vlog),” YouTube video, 10:06, posted by “ZackScottGames,” May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcdFfNzJfB4>; Phil Burnell (DSPGaming), “Special Update RANT: YouTube Issues, Metro LL, OneChannel, Nintendo, and More,” YouTube video, 59:51, posted by “DSPGaming,” May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2i3epDsznQs>; Ghostrobo, “Nintendo Nukes Let's Players,” Youtube video, 12:58, posted by “GhostRobo,” May 16th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heLdgoOgPRU>; John Bain (TotalBiscuit), “Content Patch – May 17th, 2013 – Ep. 085 [Nintendo targets Lets Plays],” Youtube video, 34:06, posted by “TotalBiscuit,” May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yX4io2O4EI>

⁶¹⁰ Mike Rose, “Nintendo Reveals YouTube Affiliate Program for Let's Players,” *Gamasutra*, May 27th, 2014, accessed Sept. 20th, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/218572/Nintendo_reveals_Youtube_affiliate_program_for_Lets_Players.php

commentators on YouTube to register specific videos or entire channels that use footage of Nintendo games from an approved white list, get the registered content reviewed by three days, and finally receive 70 % and 60 % of the remaining ad revenue from their channels and videos, respectively.⁶¹¹ The program's EULA also emphasizes that the license to use their content granted by this program comes with restrictions and that participants will grant:

Nintendo a perpetual, worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, transferable, license to use, reproduce, distribute, display, stream, publicly perform, publish, adapt, make available for transmission and modify the Videos for purposes of promoting, advertising and marketing the Nintendo Creators Program and Nintendo hardware, software, products and services.⁶¹²

In response to this program, gameplay commentators like PewDiePie, Boogie2988, and TotalBiscuit criticized it for creating a system that betrays supportive fans and in which Nintendo holds the power to deny partnerships and revenue to commentators whose videos are too critical of its games and further dilutes the portion of ad revenue obtained by commentators.⁶¹³ Like the Content ID system it uses, Nintendo's Creator Program makes no distinction between gameplay commentators' commercial and transformative appropriation of their content for fair use criticism and parody or for more affirmational and promotional purposes. These publisher-backed partnership programs highlight the asymmetrical power relations between gameplay commentators and game companies that can emerge as a result of the disproportionate power that YouTube's Content ID system affords to media corporations. The regulatory power afforded to them by YouTube's Content ID software is reinforced by their unquestioned belief in the proprietary right of companies to grant players permission to appropriate their content and to profit from their media work regardless of the purpose of their appropriative act. Ultimately,

⁶¹¹ "About the Nintendo Creators Program," *Nintendo*, accessed March 24th, 2015, <https://r.ncp.nintendo.net/guide/>

⁶¹² "Nintendo Creators Program End-User License Agreement," *Nintendo*, accessed March 24th, 2015, <https://r.ncp.nintendo.net/terms/>

⁶¹³ Such responses and arguments can be found within the following blogs, videos, and publications: Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie), "Nintendo 'sharing' YouTube Ad Revenue," *Pewdie.Tumblr.com*, January 30th, 2015, <http://pewdie.tumblr.com/post/109571543425/nintendo-sharing-youtube-ad-revenue>; Boogie2988, "Nintendo's 'Partner' Program is BAD for YOUTUBE," YouTube video, 6:39, posted by "Boogie2988," January 30th, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5cEU51PbTw>; John Bain (Totalbiscuit), "Nintendo's affiliate program, fraudulent FarCry 4 keys from Origin revoked - Jan. 30Th, 2015," YouTube video, 26:45, posted by "TotalBiscuit," Jan. 30, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-67CvWTQ0I>; Stuart Dredge, "YouTube star PewDiePie criticises Nintendo's new revenue-sharing plans," *The Guardian*. February 2nd, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/feb/02/youtube-pewdiepie-nintendo-revenue-sharing>; Patricia Hernandez, "Nintendo's YouTube Plan is Already Being Panned by YouTubers," *Kotaku*, January 29th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/nintendos-youtube-plan-is-already-being-panned-by-youtu-1682527904>

however, automated content filtering systems like Content ID and these type of contractual agreements have become a core part of communicative capitalism's apparatus of flexible control strategies and their attempt to profitably channel the voluntarily given social productivity and creative agency of users online.

The Continuing Vulnerability of Commentators to the Choices of Online Platforms

Despite YouTube's desire to similarly channel the online participatory activity of creative users, it recently required MCNs like Machinima Inc. and Maker Studios in December 2013 to divide their partnered channels into either managed channels whose content they will take responsibility for with regard to copyright or unprotected affiliate channels whose users will bear the risk of copyright infringement themselves and be exposed to Content ID sweeps.⁶¹⁴ This action was a response to a fear of a more antagonistic stance from media corporations against user-generated MCN content. On its rebranded webpage outlining its new tiers for creators and the different services attached to them in late 2014 after the intervention of Google, Machinima Inc. even reveals that only managed channels, which are selected by the MCN itself, will obtain “advanced copyright and strike assistance.”⁶¹⁵ YouTube's intervention resulted in widespread content matches on gameplay commentary videos that blocked their monetization and temporarily transferred these rights and future ad revenue to various third parties. The matches with these videos were often due to the presence of music and cut-scenes within the captured gameplay footage, static elements within games that co-exist with their more interactive qualities. Although, as Sal Humphreys has recognized, it is difficult to inject games into the sphere of copyright law because fixation is required in order for a copy of a cultural text to

⁶¹⁴ For reporting on this platform-wide copyright crisis involving gameplay commentators, see Megan Geuss, “YouTube Goes Nuts Flagging Game-Related Content as Violating Copyright,” *Ars Technica*, last modified on December 13th 2013, accessed January 22nd, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/business/2013/12/youtube-goes-nuts-flagging-game-related-content-as-violating-copyright/>; Jeffrey Grubb, “YouTube suddenly begins flagging hundreds of game-related videos for copyright violations,” *VentureBeat*, last modified on December 10th, 2013, accessed January 22nd 2014, <http://venturebeat.com/2013/12/10/youtube-suddenly-begins-flagging-dozens-of-game-related-videos-for-copyright-violations/>; Colin Campbell, “YouTube video game Shows hit with Copyright Blitz,” *Polygon*, last modified on December 10th, 2013, accessed January 23rd, 2014, <http://www.polygon.com/2013/12/10/5198276/youtube-video-game-shows-hit-with-copyright-blitz>; Colin Campbell, “Everything you need to know about the YouTube Copyright Crisis and why you should care,” *Polygon*, last modified on December 14th, 2013, accessed January 21st 2014, <http://www.polygon.com/2013/12/14/5208782/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-youtube-copyright-crisis>; “YouTube culls game clips as publishers defend fans,” *BBC News*, last modified on December 12th, 2013, accessed January 21st, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-25351123>

⁶¹⁵ “Machinima Talent Products and Services,” *Machinima*, accessed March 25th, 2015, <http://www.machinima.com/talent/> [inactive]

exist,⁶¹⁶ the automatic enforcement of copyright represented by YouTube's regulatory Content ID system can still occur due to the medium's hybrid nature. In his analysis of games and copyright law, Bruce Boyden has similarly concluded that, while the interactive play of a game is part of an uncopyrightable system, its fixed elements can still be copyrighted.⁶¹⁷ Nevertheless, the work of Greg Lastowka and W. Joss Nichols has emphasized the need to interrogate whether or not gamers' productive play such as gameplay recordings might be subject to copyright protection with Nichols concluding that such protection is supported by U.S. Copyright law.⁶¹⁸ It is this very question that grounds disputes like the conflict between the Korean E-Sports Association and Blizzard over the commercial rights to gameplay recordings of the latter's games,⁶¹⁹ but also the growing tension over who owns the rights to the gameplay commentary videos that are emerging on YouTube.

In response to Google's expanding application of its copyright enforcement software in late 2013 to gameplay commentary videos produced by MCN partners and the ensuing transfer of ownership over them to third parties, commentators criticized the media actors involved for failing to appreciate the value their coverage offers, but also defended their commentaries as being fair use, the product of their labour, and, consequently, their own property. Gameplay commentators on YouTube like GhostRobo, AngryJoe, and CaptainSparklez have criticized its Content ID system for claiming the product of their personal labour and directing the entirety of their ad revenue to third parties including game companies and Google itself.⁶²⁰ Echoing a fair use defense, commentator CaptainSparklez also criticized YouTube and game companies for not taking into account their transformation of copyrighted content through the addition of audio

⁶¹⁶ Humphreys, "Productive Players: Online Computer Games' Challenge to Conventional Media Forms," 42-44.

⁶¹⁷ See Bruce Boyden, "Games and Other Uncopyrightable Systems," *Georgia Mason Law Review* 18, no 2 (2011): 439-479.

⁶¹⁸ See Greg Lastowka, "Copyright Law and Video Games: A Brief History of an Interactive Medium," *SAGE Handbook of Intellectual Property*, edited by Matthew David and Debora Halbert, (Los Angeles, SAGE, 2015), 495-514; W. Joss Nichols, "Painting Through Pixels: The Case for Copyright in Videogame Play," *Columbia Journal of Law and the Arts* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 101-131.

⁶¹⁹ For a description of this dispute, see Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*, 162-173.

⁶²⁰ GhostoRobo, "YouTube Copyright Apocalypse (100 + of MY videos affected!!)," YouTube video, 16:25, posted by "GhostRobo," December 10th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaJF0-BkXRg>; Captain Sparklez, "Content ID and YouTube's Copyright Catastrophe," YouTube video, 19:56, posted by "CaptainSparklez," December 15th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In7abHD5CLs>; Joe Vargas, "YouTube Copyright Disaster!," YouTube Video, 18:07, posted by "AngryJoeShow," December 11th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQfHdasuWtI>

commentary or their unique interactive inputs during the gameplay experience itself.⁶²¹ YouTube-based commentators like TotalBiscuit and GhostRobo have even argued within their videos that the appropriated games used for their gameplay commentary videos function as a 'stage' or an empty 'canvas' with which commentators create an original media object, an object that is transformed due to the commentary they contribute and their unique interactions with a game and thus not a derivative copy subject to copyright enforcement.⁶²² Furthermore, commentators on YouTube like CaptainSparklez and GhostRobo again also defensively emphasize the substantive value that their videos and the frequently enthusiastic commentary within them offer to game companies as free, promotional material for their products.⁶²³ These defensive arguments reveal how YouTube-based gameplay commentators, who seek to build an engaged audience around their personal reactions to a game and to profit from it, mostly accept a Web 2.0 vision of gameplay commentary that emphasizes the creative input of commentator personalities and voices an implicit claim of individual ownership over the products of their labour, but also deferentially recognize their promotional and supportive role within the digital games industry. Despite these protestations and the seemingly contradictory values that inform them, copyright claims still occur on their videos and, if appealed and repeatedly rejected by a claimant, they can result in copyright strikes against the channel and its potential suspension and termination, a dire consequence that can compel commentators to avoid disputing claims.⁶²⁴ YouTube's automatic Content ID filtering system is thus structured in a manner that accords an unequal amount of strategic power to copyright claimants using it without them having to determine whether or not a use of their copyrighted content is fair and without Google employees having to judge whether a copyright claim is justified or a fraudulent attempt by a

⁶²¹ Captain Sparklez, "Content ID and YouTube's Copyright Catastrophe," YouTube video, 19:56, posted by "CaptainSparklez," December 15th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In7abHD5CLs>

⁶²² See John Bain (TotalBiscuit), "Content Patch – May 17th, 2013 – Ep. 085 [Nintendo Targets Lets Plays]," YouTube video, 34:08, posted by "TotalBiscuit," May 17th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yX4io2O4EI>; John Bain (Totalbiscuit), "YouTube Copyright Blitz Focuses on Gameplay Videos – Dec. 12th, 2013," YouTube video, 29:57, posted by "TotalBiscuit," Dec. 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JqjDhuPFaQ>; GhostRobo, "YouTube Copyright Apocalypse (100+ of MY videos affected!)," YouTube video, 16:24, posted by "GhostRobo," Dec. 10th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaJF0-BkXRg>

⁶²³ Ghostrobo, "YouTube Copyright Apocalypse (100+ of MY videos affected!)," YouTube video, 16:24, posted by "GhostRobo," Dec. 10th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaJF0-BkXRg>; "Content ID and YouTube's Copyright Catastrophe," YouTube video, 19:56, posted by "Captain Sparklez," Dec. 15th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In7abHD5CLs>

⁶²⁴ "Appealing Rejected Content ID Disputes," *Google*, accessed on February 5th, 2014, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2770411?hl=en>

third party to obtain a user's ad revenue. In contrast, YouTube's content ID system affords very little room for tactical negotiation and response by the gameplay commentators who appropriate and transform copyrighted material. Due to this power asymmetry between copyright owners and commentators, small and more prominent gameplay commentators like Totalbiscuit would even participate in the Where's The Fair Use? campaign outlined in the previous chapter in order to pressure YouTube's owners to change this default system to be more accommodating of the fair use appropriations of game content occasionally seen within gameplay commentary videos.⁶²⁵ A few months later on April 28th, 2016, YouTube announced changes to its Content ID system in response to this movement that would now refrain from automatically diverting ad revenue to the copyright claimant; instead, with this new incarnation of Content ID, YouTube will "continue to run ads on that video and hold the resulting revenue separately" when "a creator and someone making a claim choose to monetize a video" and, once "the Content ID claim or dispute is resolved," the platform will "pay out that revenue to the appropriate party."⁶²⁶ Despite this change, the automated character of Content ID can still disrupt the livelihood of gameplay commentators who must still wait till a claim is resolved in order to receive ad revenue for their content, a fear that is not equally shared by the media corporations making copyright claims given their wealth. Moreover, it still does not necessitate the copyright claimant to assess whether an appropriation of their content within a gameplay commentary video is fair or not and thus renders it vulnerable to being removed instantaneously following a claim. In short, despite this significant change, Content ID still accords the copyright owners of media properties, not average users, a greater degree of control and power when it comes to the distribution and regulation of user-generated media on YouTube while, due to its mostly automated character, it preserves YouTube's strategy of inclusion by refraining from restricting user-generated content prior to the uploading process.

The Experience of Exploitation, Inequality, and Control by Game Commentators

Aside from this growing discontent towards the regulatory constraints on their practice that result from YouTube's chosen content filtering system and its attention economy's pursuit of ad revenue, commentators like Ohmwrecker have also criticized YouTube-based MCNs for the

⁶²⁵ "Vlog - Where's The Fair Use? (behind the sofa probably) # WTFU," YouTube video, 20:33, posted by "Totalbiscuit," February 26th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ExS1-pPZvM>

⁶²⁶ David Rosenstein, "YouTube Creator Blog: Improving Content ID for Creators," *YouTube Creator Blog*, April 28th, 2016, <http://youtubecreator.blogspot.ca/2016/04/improving-content-id-for-creators.html>

minimal value that they offer to partners in exchange for their ad revenue despite promises of support with audience building, participation in promotional integrations and events, the ability to monetize videos without going through YouTube's screening process, and protection of their content from copyright claims and Content ID.⁶²⁷ Now with MCN Curse, Ohmwrecker, for instance, once split 40 % of his remaining ad revenue with Maker Studios' subnetwork Polaris despite their promise to help with audience building rarely being fulfilled.⁶²⁸ Furthermore, because YouTube now subjects affiliate partners to copyright sweeps and a screening process for monetization, he has also argued that MCN partners are now barely different from a creator who uses Google's Ad Sense program, yet the revenue split within MCN contracts or the contracts themselves have not been altered to reflect these changes.⁶²⁹ Another commentator named Clash has voiced a similar criticism about Machinima Inc. and denounced their lack of transparency with regard to payment, a situation reinforced by MCNs' non-disclosure agreements.⁶³⁰ Gameplay commentators are thus constantly aware of the value they offer and are always re-evaluating the value exchanged between themselves and MCNs. All of the friction outlined in the previous paragraphs, however, foregrounds how power relations and forms of inequality often emerge between gameplay commentators and an assemblage of established and new media actors ranging from game publishers to Google and MCNs when the first group of actors are deprived of possessing enough control over the products of their labour and the value they receive in exchange for it.

However, given the agency that persists within the constraints of these relationships and the financial benefits that commentators do receive from what was once a non-profit hobby, it remains difficult to determine whether or not these unequal power relations are evidence of

⁶²⁷ Ohmwrecker, "MCN Follow-Up – Content ID, & the Greedy MCNs," YouTube video, 22:49, posted by "MaskedGamer," December 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2gswdiH3VE>; Clash, "A Video For Machinima," YouTube Video, 17:37, posted by "Clash," January 5th, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHJ0pxLogLY>

⁶²⁸ Ohmwrecker, "MCN Follow-Up – Content ID, & the Greedy MCNs," YouTube video, 22:49, posted by "MaskedGamer," December 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2gswdiH3VE>; Ohmwrecker, "Surprise! MCN Partnered YouTubers Get Screwed – Managed vs Affiliate Maker RPM Polaris," YouTube video, 22:24, posted by "MaskedGamer," December 5th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DB9pCFzZfLg>

⁶²⁹ Ohmwrecker, "MCN Follow-Up – Content ID, & the Greedy MCNs," YouTube video, 22:49, posted by "MaskedGamer," December 12th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2gswdiH3VE>; Ohmwrecker, "Surprise! MCN Partnered YouTubers Get Screwed – Managed vs Affiliate Maker RPM Polaris," YouTube video, 22:24, posted by "MaskedGamer," December 5th, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DB9pCFzZfLg>

⁶³⁰ Clash, "A Video For Machinima," YouTube Video, 17:37, posted by "Clash," January 5th, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHJ0pxLogLY>

social media users being the unconscious and coerced victims of the exploitative strategies adopted by the above network of corporate actors: For their part, Mark Andrejevic and Christian Fuchs have contended that social media platforms are exploiting the freely given labour of users and the vast amount of user-generated data and content it produces by converting this data and the audience surrounding this media into a profitable commodity to be sold to advertisers.⁶³¹ Likewise, Dean has argued that affect-driven, personalized participatory media like many gameplay commentary videos, which are encouraged by communicative capitalism, produces individualistic contributions for the affective networks of Web 2.0 platforms, all of which builds a participatory form of spectacle that captures our labour and affect in service of capitalistic interests.⁶³² Here, Dean's characterization of communicative capitalism's effects seemingly parallels the personality-driven incarnations of gameplay commentary thriving on YouTube and the eventual capture of the immaterial labour and affect of its practitioners and surrounding viewers. However, this narrative of total capitalistic capture accords too much power to the neoliberal form of control embodied by communicative capitalism. As illustrated within this chapter's analysis of SA's Let's Play subculture, alternative values and internet structures can shape the content and form of social media hosted on YouTube and guide them towards less profit-driven and more culturally oriented goals while simultaneously driving the construction and adoption of less commercial and alternative platforms like the Let's Play Archive or The Internet Archive. Holding similar values, a few creators who have engaged in gameplay commentary on YouTube like Matt Lees have even sought to distance themselves from the platform's ad-supported attention economy by adopting fan-driven crowdfunding platforms like Patreon to fund their productive play, thus allowing their videos to be ad-and-sponsor free.⁶³³ However, YouTube eventually responded to this movement of funds outside its own platform by constructing a 'Fan Funding' feature on the site that enables it to acquire approximately 5 % of all donations to channel owners.⁶³⁴ While initially introduced to the platform in September 2014 in a few select countries including the United States and offered to all of the platform's users,⁶³⁵ this

⁶³¹ Andrejevic, "Exploiting YouTube: Contradictions of User-Generated Labour," 414-420; Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 97-119.

⁶³² Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, 92, 95, 110-114, 119, 123-124.

⁶³³ Matt Lees, "Support Matt Lees creating Sustainable Gaming Videos for Grown-ups," *Patreon*, accessed Sept. 15th, 2014, <http://www.patreon.com/mattlees>

⁶³⁴ Todd Spangler, "YouTube Will Take 5% Plus Cut of Crowdfunding Donations," *Variety*, September 2nd, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/youtube-will-take-5-plus-cut-of-crowdfunding-donations-1201296021/>

⁶³⁵ Cassandra Shaw, "Give money to your favorite YouTube channels with Fan Funding," *The Verge*, September 3rd,

crowdfunding option of the YouTube Gaming platform offered fans of gameplay commentators the ability to give one-time donations or funds to live-streaming gameplay commentators while YouTube itself takes a 5 % cut from the donation as well as a small amount in order to process the exchange between fan and creator.⁶³⁶ This implementation of crowdfunding features without any input from their userbase is another strategy through which the owners of YouTube are attempting to include the social productivity of online users and commercially channel the viewer affect produced by their labour. Despite being another means for YouTube to channel the productive affect of online users for user creators and gameplay commentators for their own benefit, Fan Funding is framed by the platform as a new empowering option for creators to make revenue as well as a positive means for individual users to support their favourite creators and be publicly recognized for this support following a donation with an accompanying comment.⁶³⁷ While external viewer donations do continue to be received by gameplay commentators as they seek to tactically negotiate the always evolving strategies of YouTube, what were once funding alternatives are now being directly adopted by social media platforms in order to entice users into using them on the platform itself where their immaterial labour and all of its common products — the attention and affect of their audience — can continue to be converted into money for Google, but also for themselves.

For this reason, while many practitioners of gameplay commentary do express ambivalent feelings about its growing incorporation within YouTube's commercial attention economy, Taylor's warning about the tendency to view the blurring of play and money as inherently corrupt or the sign of the former's totalizing commercial capture and exploitation needs to be taken seriously.⁶³⁸ For example, John Banks and Sal Humphreys have emphasized how misleading it is to frame creative users as “unknowing and exploited people who do not recognize the conditions under which they produce value.”⁶³⁹ Instead, they foreground the

2014, <http://www.theverge.com/2014/9/3/6100771/youtube-fan-funding-content-creators>

⁶³⁶ “Fan Funding on YouTube Gaming,” *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016,

<https://support.google.com/youtubegaming/answer/6294940?hl=en>; “About Fan Funding,” *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6052077>

⁶³⁷ “Fan Funding on YouTube Gaming,” *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016,

<https://support.google.com/youtubegaming/answer/6294940?hl=en>; “About Fan Funding,” *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6052077>; Matthew Glotzbach, “Look Ahead: Creator Features Coming to YouTube,” *YouTube Creator Blogspot*, June 26th, 2014, accessed March 28th, 2016, <http://youtubecreator.blogspot.ca/2014/06/look-ahead-creator-features-coming-to.html>

⁶³⁸ Taylor, *Raising the Stakes: e-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*, 98-100.

⁶³⁹ John Banks and Sal Humphreys, “The Labour of User Co-creators: Emergent Social Network Markets?”

increasingly interconnected relationships of co-creation between users and commercial forces within social network markets.⁶⁴⁰ Echoing this argument David Hesmondhalgh has similarly criticized the representation of voluntarily created, user-generated content (UGC) as exploited free labour for its failure to avoid an autonomist idealization of free labour against capital and recognize the absence of compulsion and the other alternative values that might act as a fulfilling enough reward to users.⁶⁴¹ Similarly, Abigail de Kosnik and Kimberlee Weatherall have emphasized how the academic idealization of fan or user-generated content as free or non-commercial can produce a disempowered second class of creativity with no means of monetarily benefiting those who engage in it as well as ignore how money always already permeates fan practices like gameplay commentary.⁶⁴² Weatherall goes further in this critique by suggesting that representing user content as a “non-commercial activity” can have the effect of injecting “a condition of non-commerciality [...] into the copyright law framework,” an assertion she supports by referring to Canada's new Copyright Modernization Act, which includes an exception for “non-commercial user-generated content” exclusively.⁶⁴³ As Weatherall further argues, it is not exactly clear whether users who profit from the ads placed on their videos would be protected under this exception,⁶⁴⁴ an ambiguity that weakens the protections that could be afforded to Canadian gameplay commentators within partnership programs with MCNs. Matt Hills has similarly warned fan scholarship from representing fan work as anti-commercial or captured by the commercial realm and encouraged scholars to acknowledge the dynamic contradictions that exist within this cultural space.⁶⁴⁵ For instance, although many gameplay commentators on SA and YouTube do not create content solely in order to monetize it and chastise those who do, the commercial qualities that this practice has begun to acquire render it a unique and contradictory object of interest for the fields of game and fan studies. In order to meet the requirements for a

Convergence 14 (2008): 415, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856508094660>.

⁶⁴⁰ Banks and Humphreys, “The Labour of User Co-creators: Emergent Social Network Markets?,” 404-407, 412-414.

⁶⁴¹ David Hesmondhalgh, “User-Generated Content, Free Labour, and the Culture Industries,” *Ephemera* 10, no. 3/4 (2010): 272-276; 278-279, <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/10-3hesmondhalgh.pdf>.

⁶⁴² Abigail de Kosnik, “Interrogating 'Free' Fan Labor,” *Spreadable Media*, accessed September 25th, 2014, <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/kosnik/#.VDI4bEuMFfM>; Kimberlee Weatherall, “The Relationship Between User-generated Content and Commerce,” in *Amateur Media: Social, Cultural, and Legal Perspectives*, eds. Dan Hunter, Ramon Lobato, Megan Richardson, and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59-62.

⁶⁴³ Weatherall, “The Relationship Between User-generated Content and Commerce,” 61.

⁶⁴⁴ Weatherall, “The Relationship Between User-generated Content and Commerce,” 61.

⁶⁴⁵ Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 3-6.

strong fair use defense and be protected from the excessive proprietary control strategies adopted by the media industry, most appropriation-based user videos on YouTube are non-commercial out of necessity. In this case, however, most actors within the media industry — game developers, publishers, MCNs, Google, and online consumers — tolerate and encourage this appropriation-based form of productive play and its monetization. This acceptance enables the labour of gameplay commentators to be financially compensated by advertisers, developers, publishers, and fans while carving out a cultural *and* commercial media space that allows commentators to sustain their practice and continue to produce content. In some cases, as with PewDiePie, SeaNanners, TheSyndicateProject, and the Yogscast team, gameplay commentators can gain enough power to establish the terms of their commercial interactions with game developers and other media entities or to create their own alternative MCNs. In addition, the financial capital often accumulated by players, MCNs, Google, and developers as a result of these relationships co-exists with the non-monetary forms of cultural value and capital privileged by certain YouTube commentators, but especially the SA Let's Play subforum where a stronger emphasis is placed on formal creativity, performative skill, and audio commentary that communicates useful and interesting information about a game. These alternative cultural values are even exemplified by the SA-centered Let's Play Archive and its use of the Internet Archive to host their Let's Play videos more permanently and for free outside the constraints of the YouTube platform, its Content ID system, and its ad-based attention economy. Moreover, while greed and disrespect of the appropriated game is often stigmatized by SA Let's Players, the majority of commentators and their fans on SA and YouTube accept the interaction of these two distinct value systems — communal and social capital vs. more commercial values — and appreciate the opportunity to financially benefit from their hobby's audience, whether through YouTube's monetization and donation features or through alternative funding platforms like Patreon. As a result, a reductive narrative of pure exploitation or anti-industry empowerment surrounding this fan-driven media practice could only fail to account for the liminal status of gameplay commentary as it exists between these two interacting systems of value.

A narrative framing social media users solely in terms of exploited labour is also complicated by the reality that, in 2014, MCNs like Machinima and Maker Studios are constantly struggling to be profitable possibly due to the inferior ad revenue obtained via social media platforms like YouTube and the costs associated with managing a MCN and producing

original content.⁶⁴⁶ Even more recently, in 2015, YouTube itself has still not become profitable due to the high costs connected to the platform.⁶⁴⁷ Although this situation may eventually change, in this light, the subjective evaluation of the value exchange involved in MCN partnerships by commentators like Ohmwrecker, while still valid, appears difficult to integrate into a traditional Marxist conception of exploitation where the extraction of surplus value from productive labour is profitable. However, even if the relationships between gameplay commentators, MCNs, and YouTube is not as profitable as suggested by a dominant conception of exploitation, power relationships and forms of inequality remain between them and the overall network of corporate actors related to social media platforms including video game companies. For instance, once one takes into account the 45 % cut of ad revenue acquired by Google and the remainder obtained by an MCN or a game publisher like Nintendo along with the low-cost promotional benefits for all game companies offered by gameplay commentary videos, commentators do enter into an unequal exchange of value with these entities and, as suggested earlier, are often very aware of this fact. As indicated earlier, game companies like Nintendo, in particular, can use YouTube's Content ID system to obtain ad revenue from the labour of gameplay commentators with little cost to themselves, thus offering them an additional profitable source of revenue. While not every involved actor can profit from such relations, the engaged audience that the content of gameplay commentators builds is, in aggregate, usually more productive and beneficial for game companies, MCNs, and YouTube than it is for them. Moreover, for commentators whose videos and their ad revenue are claimed or who do not get to benefit as much from the increasing amount of money accumulated by Google and MCNs via YouTube's attention economy due to the dwindling prices for social media ads,⁶⁴⁸ this unbalanced exchange will only be compounded, even if commentators willingly enter it. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the persisting agency of commentators amidst the

⁶⁴⁶ See Todd Spangler, "Machinima Cuts 42 Jobs, in YouTube Network's Latest Round of Layoffs," *Variety*, March 6th, 2014, accessed Sept. 19th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/machinima-cuts-42-jobs-in-youtube-networks-latest-round-of-layoffs-1201126987/>; Andrew Wallenstein, "Why Disney is Taking the Huge Risk of Buying Maker Studios," *Variety*, March 24th, 2014, accessed Sept. 22nd, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/why-disney-is-taking-the-huge-risk-of-buying-maker-studios-1201145135/>

⁶⁴⁷ Rolfe Winkler, "YouTube: 1 Billion Viewers, No Profit," *Wall Street Journal*, February 25th, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/viewers-dont-add-up-to-profit-for-youtube-1424897967>

⁶⁴⁸ Tim Worstall, "Google's YouTube Ad Revenues May Hit \$ 5.6 Billion in 2013," *Forbes*, December 12th, 2013, accessed Sept. 25th, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2013/12/12/googles-youtube-ad-revenues-may-hit-5-6-billion-in-2013/>; Leslie Kaufman, "Chasing Their Star, on YouTube," *New York Times*, Feb. 1st, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/business/chasing-their-star-on-youtube.html?_r=0

determining neoliberal structures of communicative capitalism in a manner that avoids Adornian critical theory's tendency to frame citizens as truly disempowered and coerced. However, contrary to the interventions of Banks, Humphreys, and Hesmondhalgh who see users' awareness of their conditions or the lack of compulsion driving them as undercutting a particular narrative of exploitation, it is also necessary to acknowledge how the agency and conscious activity of gameplay commentators still exists within power relations and amidst unique constraints shaped by the platform to which they are attached and by the corporate entities that its regulatory and audience commodification strategies privilege. And, occasionally, this power asymmetry entails an unequal distribution of benefits that parallels the inequality typically present within a relation of exploitation.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to counter the vision of pure exploitation constructed by Andrejevic and Fuchs by foregrounding the lack of profit from ad revenue that tends to accompany social media platforms among other things, scholars Adam Arvidsson and Elanor Colleoni have also usefully highlighted that brands like Facebook, YouTube, and Machinima Inc. are built on “the accumulation of affective investments” by online users and the subjective financial valuation of the brand's potential to attract future investments and profit based on this affective attachment.⁶⁴⁹ Operating under this affective and subjective theory of valuation, even struggling MCNs like Machinima Inc. can be valued at large amounts like 190 million U.S. Dollars.⁶⁵⁰ Similarly, as detailed in the introduction, due to the qualitative valuations of the affective investments embodied by gameplay commentators and their large viewership on social media platforms, Google and Warner Brothers can be incentivized to invest millions of dollars into Machinima Inc., Disney compelled to purchase the more successful, but still risky MCN Maker Studios, and Amazon enticed to buy out Twitch.⁶⁵¹ Even commentators themselves

⁶⁴⁹ Adam Arvidsson and Elanor Colleoni, "Value in Informational Capitalism and on the Internet," *The Information Society* 28, no. 3 (2012): 145-146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2012.669449>

⁶⁵⁰ Paul Bond, "Machinima Lays Off 11 Percent of Staff," *Hollywood Reporter*, September 18th, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/machinima-lays-11-percent-staff-631758>

⁶⁵¹ See Connie Guglielmo, "Google Invests in Machinima, Sees 'Financial Return,'" *Forbes*, May 21st, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/connieguglielmo/2012/05/21/google-invests-in-machinima-sees-financial-return/>; Todd Spangler, "Warner Bros. Is Buying a Stake in Struggling YouTube Net Machinima. Here's Why," *Variety*, March 10th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/digital/news/warner-bros-is-buying-a-stake-in-struggling-youtube-net-machinima-heres-why-1201127883/>; Andrew Wallenstein, "Warner Bros. Increases Investment in Machinima," *Variety*, February 19th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/warner-bros-increases-investment-in-machinima-1201437440/>; Todd Spangler, "Disney Buys Maker Studios in Deal Worth At Least 500 Million," *Variety*, March 24th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/biz/news/disney-buys-maker-studios-in-deal-worth-at-least-500-million-1201145068/>; Kim Gittleston, "Amazon buys Video-game Streaming Site Twitch," *BBC News*, August 25th, 2014,

subjectively evaluate the affective investments of their audience when negotiating their revenue split with MCNs. However, they never benefit from these other types of buy-outs or investments, which lie outside the visible realm of platform activity. Outside of ad revenue, subscriptions, or donations, this additional and frequently undiscussed form of commercial exchange reflects another level in which the labour of commentators is not properly compensated and where its true value is predominantly accumulated and exploited by MCNs and platforms, the objects of these affective investments.

Online Platforms' Default Features and their Influence on Game Commentators

Furthermore, although commentators knowingly choose their platform and understand the forms of inequality and exploitation that can accompany it, the monopolistic control possessed by Google over video-based, social media compels them to accept YouTube's default systems of regulation, Content ID, and its predominantly view- and subscriber-based system of monetization and audience building: Recognizing the increasing centrality and importance of Google services to citizens and online users, Vaidhyathan has stressed how the power of its default settings and systems structure and restrict the potential choice and control that its users have within this space.⁶⁵² More importantly, while these structures are the foundation for the agency that exists on YouTube, he argues that "meaningful freedom implies real control over the conditions of one's life."⁶⁵³ Similarly, while gameplay commentators always retain a certain degree of tactical agency within social media platforms, this relative autonomy is not allowed to have an effect on their structural conditions and, thus, aside from mobilizing to exert some form of public pressure on their owners, these commentators can never directly choose to change default systems like Content ID, which are adopted by Google in order for it and other media actors to profit from the viewership accumulated by users. A parallel situation emerges with Twitch given that it is the primary viable alternative for commentators to Google's popular platform and holds a similar monopoly over the monetization of live-streamed gameplay commentary. In this space, gameplay commentators who livestream their content are subject to similar default systems like an automated content filtering system similar to that of YouTube as well as unexpected changes to the platform's architecture such as the 2014 removal of streamers'

<http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-28930781>

⁶⁵² Vaidhyathan, *The Googlization of Everything (and Why We Should Worry)*, 89-90.

⁶⁵³ Vaidhyathan, *The Googlization of Everything (and Why We Should Worry)*, 89.

ability to indefinitely archive their past broadcasts.⁶⁵⁴ Likewise, on YouTube, gameplay commentators are also vulnerable to sudden changes to its policies and the platform's features including its aforementioned decision to create arbitrary hierarchies amongst commentators partnered with MCNs or the forced inclusion of their content as part of their new YouTube Red subscription system and its distinct revenue sharing agreement.⁶⁵⁵ With other past hosting video platforms like Blip TV — which was acquired in 2013 by Maker Studios, owner of sub-network Polaris — the gameplay commentators who used it were similarly vulnerable to the effects of its unexpected decisions such as its choice to purge the past video content of its users and, eventually, shut down the platform in its entirety.⁶⁵⁶ Compelled to adopt YouTube due to the extreme popularity it holds within society, gameplay commentators are also frequently subject to the stringent terms and actions of the MCNs who exploit its platform features. Responding to a recent lawsuit against them over copyrighted music in 2015,⁶⁵⁷ MCN Maker Studios and its sub-network Polaris began to render "private" several gameplay commentary videos featuring copyrighted music within the appropriated games without the consent of the commentator, a decision that angered some of its partners like Jesse Cox and compelled him to leave the network.⁶⁵⁸ A similar exercise of the control behind the platform's features held by YouTube and

⁶⁵⁴ Michael McWerthor, "Twitch implements YouTube-like system for blocking copyrighted audio," *Polygon*, August 6th, 2014, <http://www.polygon.com/2014/8/6/5976565/twitch-music-content-id-dmca>; Peter Bright, "Twitch CEO says audio muting will get better, no plans to mute live streams," *Ars Technica*, August 7th, 2014, <http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/08/twitch-ceo-says-audio-muting-will-get-better-no-plans-to-mute-live-streams/>

⁶⁵⁵ Michal Addady, "YouTube Stars Must Sign This Or Their Videos will Vanish," *Fortune*, October 22nd, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/10/22/youtube-red-content-creators/>

⁶⁵⁶ Todd Spangler, "Maker Studios Completes Blip Acquisition," *Variety*, September 6th, 2013, accessed Sept. 25th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2013/digital/news/maker-studios-completes-blip-acquisition-1200601466/>; Janko Roettgers, "Shrinking Pains: Blip Upsets Publishers by Removing Countless Videos," *Gigaom*, December 2nd, 2013, accessed Sept. 27th, 2014, <https://gigaom.com/2013/12/02/shrinking-pains-blip-upsets-publishers-by-deleting-countless-videos/>; Janko Roettgers, "Blip is Dead as Maker Studios Shuts Down Video Pioneer," *Variety*, August 20th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/disney-owned-maker-studios-shuts-down-pioneering-video-site-blip-1201575041/>

⁶⁵⁷ Todd Spangler, Music-Licensing Firm Sues 4 YouTube Multichannel Networks for Copyright Infringement," *Variety*, February 17th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/music-licensing-firm-sues-maker-studios-awesomenesstv-and-broadbandtv-for-copyright-infringement-1201435336/>

⁶⁵⁸ Hannah Rutherford, "Mini Hiatus Info - Please Watch!," YouTube video, 5:58, posted by "YOGSCAST Hannah," Jan. 7th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8IV4-SQIQ&feature=youtu.be&a;> "Important Channel Announcement," YouTube video, 7:19, posted by "Jesse Cox," February 29th, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWjrL1KvZR4>; Jesse Cox (@JesseCox), "Another day, another attempt by @MakerStudios @PolarisTweets to private the videos of myself @CryWasTaken @lomadia and others," Twitter, Jan. 7th, 2016, 11:05 AM, <https://twitter.com/jessecox/status/685175523786399744>; Jesse Cox (@JesseCox), "To make matters worse, @MakerStudios and @PolarisTweets are saying either keep them private or we'll delete them," Twitter, Jan. 7th, 2016, 11:09 AM, <https://twitter.com/jessecox/status/685176447476994048>

MCNs occurred in October 2015 following the deployment of its 10 \$ per month subscription service entitled YouTube Red, which allows U.S.-based YouTube users to experience videos ad-free and gain access to exclusive media content like PewDiePie's show *ScarePewDiePie* (2016-present).⁶⁵⁹ Given the site-wide character of this subscription service, partnered YouTube creators were effectively forced to sign up for it, otherwise, according to Google's FAQ, all of their videos would automatically "be made private," thus preventing platform users from watching them.⁶⁶⁰ For those who do sign up,

New revenue from YouTube Red membership fees will be distributed to video creators based on member engagement with each creators' content. As with our advertising business, the majority of the revenue will go to creators.⁶⁶¹

Nevertheless, due to the lack of control that amateur creators like gameplay commentators have over these platform-wide changes and the significant pressure exerted by YouTube to enact them, YouTube Red's launch was highly controversial among gameplay commentators like Jesse Cox, Jim Sterling, and TotalBiscuit who were respectively worried about the unexpected changes it might bring, the lack of control that YouTube users have over these changes, or the way in which the revenue distribution system, which draws on the pool of YouTube Red subscriptions, will primarily benefit the largest and most popular channels and their content.⁶⁶² Other commentators like PewDiePie who contribute content to the service view YouTube Red as a potential benefit to smaller channels and YouTube creators as a whole because it is a means to counter the lost revenue that occurs due to the increasing number of online users who use AdBlock on social media platforms.⁶⁶³ Despite such assurances, one consequence stemming

⁶⁵⁹ "Meet YouTube Red, the Ultimate YouTube Experience," *Google Blog*, October 21st, 2015, accessed March 25th, 2016, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2015/10/red.html>; "Join YouTube Red," *Google*, accessed March 25th, 2016, https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6305537?hl=en&ref_topic=6305525

⁶⁶⁰ "YouTube Red, Music, and Original Series and Movies FAQ," *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://sites.google.com/site/ytredpress/faqs>

⁶⁶¹ "YouTube Red, Music, and Original Series and Movies FAQ," *Google*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://sites.google.com/site/ytredpress/faqs>

⁶⁶² See Adam Clark Estes, "YouTubes are Up in Arms About YouTube Red," *Gizmodo*, October 22nd, 2015, accessed March 27th, 2016, <http://gizmodo.com/youtubers-are-up-in-arms-about-youtube-red-1738022087>; Jim Sterling, "YouTube Red: A Promising Plan, Plastered in Piss," *Jimquisition*, October 25th, 2015, accessed March 28th, 2016, <http://www.thejimquisition.com/youtube-red-a-promising-plan-plastered-in-piss/>; John Bain (TotalBiscuit), "Twitlonger post," *Twitlonger*, October 23rd, 2015, accessed March 27th, 2016, http://www.twitlonger.com/show/n_1snn7r4

⁶⁶³ Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie), "Thoughts on YouTube Red," *Tumblr*, October 29th, 2015, <http://pewdie.tumblr.com/post/132147138150/thoughts-on-youtube-red>; Nick Statt, "PewDiePie urges fans to sign up for YouTube Red to defend creators from ad blocking," *The Verge*, October 30th, 2015, <http://www.theverge.com/2015/10/30/9646024/pewdiepie-felix-kjellberg-youtube-red-ad-blocking>

from the subscription service is that, because certain Japanese game publishers and YouTube partners have not signed up for YouTube Red and been highly reluctant to do so, many gameplay commentary videos featuring their games and subject to copyright claims by these publishers have also been rendered private and inaccessible.⁶⁶⁴

Due to the asymmetrical power relations they hold with Google, MCNs, and game companies, gameplay commentators, while financially benefiting from YouTube, rarely possess any form of direct control or input over the decisions of their chosen platform and its MCNs — decisions which affect the production and distribution of their content. Andrejevic's acknowledgment of the importance of alienation to the concept of exploitation and his parallel recognition of how Web 2.0 discourse tends to promise the “prospect of overcoming the alienation of control over productive activity” can shed some light on these specific forms of inequality within social media platforms.⁶⁶⁵ Economic disempowerment and exploitation among labourers, Andrejevic suggests, always entail “the loss of control over one's productive and creative activity” or “the value generated by surplus labour.”⁶⁶⁶ More importantly, echoing Vaidhyathan's critical analysis of the power of defaults, he speculates about how the background types of affordances designed for a social networking platform could potentially shape and direct user productivity into a particular form.⁶⁶⁷ If gameplay commentators want to retain continued access to the platform as well as some semblance of ownership and control of the products of their immaterial labour, they often have to abide by the profit-driven strategies and default regulatory systems of YouTube and the media partners that interact with it and, in a sense, are compelled to enter an unequal relationship with these corporate actors that affords them little control over various aspects of their productive activity. As indicated earlier in this chapter, a similar form of interplay between access and constraint is present within the EULAs and policies of game creators, which often attaches restrictive conditions to the use of a game by gameplay commentators — conditions and policies over which they similarly have no control.

⁶⁶⁴ Jed Whitaker, “Some Gaming Videos are Getting Blocked in the United States due to YouTube Red,” *Destructoid*, October 25th, 2015, accessed March 28th, 2016, http://www.destructoid.com/some-gaming-videos-are-getting-blocked-in-the-united-states-due-to-youtube-red-317354.phtml?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

⁶⁶⁵ Mark Andrejevic, “Exploitation in the Data Mine,” in *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0. and Social Media*, ed. Christian Fuchs, (London: Routledge, 2012), 78.

⁶⁶⁶ Andrejevic, “Exploitation in the Data Mine,” 77.

⁶⁶⁷ Andrejevic, “Exploitation in the Data Mine,” 81-83.

Concluding Remarks

As this chapter's numerous examples have illustrated, despite being offered voluntarily, the products of gameplay commentators' labour — their video content, but also the affect and attention they accumulate — once recontextualized within the systems of social media platforms and their surrounding network of corporate media actors are heavily shaped, claimed, limited, and controlled in service of MCNs, Google, and game companies as a result of the asymmetrical power relations that they hold with them within contracts, the platform itself, and the media industry at large. Consequently, gameplay commentators are alienated from the immaterial products of their playful labour and often do not benefit from the audience affect and attention they accumulate to the degree that they should.

Re-contextualized as static media content with the potential to gather a passionate and impressionable audience, gameplay commentary videos on YouTube and Twitch have become highly productive for the platform owners, MCNs, and game companies. These actors benefit from the immaterial labour involved through the ad revenue and donations it produces, its low-cost promotion of games and their purchase, and the monetary investments in MCNs and platforms based on the subjective evaluations of their users and viewers' affective engagement. Although the productive appropriation of copyrighted games by commentators is financially compensated, empowering them to a degree unheard of within fan culture, corporate actors are still given a disproportionate amount of control over the products of their labour and the conditions that shape it, culminating in a power relationship that often alienates them from their own work and the revenue produced from it. In spite of these constraints, commentators demonstrate varying degrees of tactical agency when it comes to how they subjectively determine the value of their work, negotiate contracts and sponsorship deals with MCNs or developers, adopt alternative or supplementary funding strategies, and, in some rare cases, create their own MCNs. Even as their potential to rewrite the meaning of a game and produce works that have cultural value beyond that privileged by YouTube's attention economy has often been squandered, commentators have also used their work and audience for more critical and community-driven ends. Examples of this tendency can be felt within the vocal opposition of YouTube commentators to the threat posed by SOPA/PIPA bills or the restrictive digital rights management policies of Microsoft with regard to the release of its new console, the XBox

One.⁶⁶⁸ Furthermore, the alternative values embraced by the Something Awful Let's Play subforum and the dominant presence of their content on YouTube itself have both foregrounded how gameplay commentary can be more culturally beneficial to online communities and resist simply supporting the industry's relentless promotional push of novel commodities. Many commentary videos examine past games – not as ephemeral commodities underserving of focused reflection – but as media objects worthy of historiographical excavation, collective discussion, and critical engagement. Moreover, as Henry Lowood and James Newman have expressed in their work, the mode of capture embodied by gameplay commentary preserves the history of how gamers play within a virtual world at a given moment and of games in general and the different cultures of play surrounding them.⁶⁶⁹ As Newman states, Let's Plays, in particular, ensure that “we get a clear sense of the range of potential playings which a given game might support and, importantly, gain insight into the performances, observations and techniques of others” while locating “gameplay, even apparently single-player gameplay, within a complex web of inter-related players, playings and ludic strategies.”⁶⁷⁰ Moreover, amidst an industry disinterested in the preservation of its history and an occasionally reactionary consumer culture often opposed to in-depth game criticism and the diversification of gaming's audience, gameplay commentary can also document the diverse forms of player practices and interactions associated with the medium from a wide range of viewpoints not limited to the industry's prized demographic of young heterosexual men. Nevertheless, through the ability of static, gameplay commentary videos to draw an audience whose attention and affective investment can be commodified or who can be enticed to fund their creation through donations, commentators have a voluntary and beneficial connection to the commercial realm, all of which problematizes a political economy understanding of social media users as fully disempowered and controlled. Regardless of the relative autonomy afforded to gameplay commentators within social media platforms, asymmetrical power relations and inequality remain due to an assemblage of corporate forces — platform owners, MCNs, and game companies — and its flexible strategies of control that shape the conditions for the expression, ownership, and commercialization of

⁶⁶⁸ For example, in addition to the vocal opposition to the Stop Online Piracy Act and Protect IP Act, gameplay commentators also mobilized against the DRM policies intended to be integrated into Microsoft's new Xbox One console and its subversion of the first sale doctrine of U.S. Copyright law.

⁶⁶⁹ Lowood, “Video Capture: Machinima, Documentation, and the History of Virtual Worlds,” 12; James Newman, *Best Before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 158-160.

⁶⁷⁰ James Newman, *Videogames*. 2nd Edition. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 62.

gameplay commentary. The increasing channeling of the labour of gameplay commentators and Let's Players on social media platforms like YouTube and Twitch and its various immaterial products through a variety of flexible control strategies is thus another example of the expanding apparatus of control emerging to support the user-driven online media ecosystem surfacing as a product of a mode of neoliberal capitalism thriving on many-to-many communication.

Section III:

Critical and Political Economic Analysis of Crowdsourcing Discourse and Media Crowdsourcing

Chapter Four: Crowdsourcing Discourse As an Incarnation of Web 2.0 Rhetoric

Before analyzing the two central user-driven online media practices of this third and final section of the dissertation which embody the seemingly more collaborative character ascribed to the Web 2.0 paradigm —YouTube's crowdsourced global mosaic *Life in a Day* (2011) and Casey Pugh's *Star Wars Uncut* project (2009-2014) — a critical examination of discourse about the Web 2.0 practice of crowdsourcing and its media incarnation needs to be undertaken. This analysis will foreground how crowdsourcing discourse is a complementary part of Web 2.0 rhetoric by highlighting how many of the claims found within it about the practice's capacity to democratize participation and collaboration on a global stage and harness the productivity and diverse perspectives of online communities parallel the similar assertions present within commentary about Web 2.0-influenced forms of collective production and interaction — commentary which was described in detail within the first chapter via the writings of Surowiecki, Benkler, and Bruns, but also O'Reilly and others. Ultimately, it will underline how, being a user-driven practice linked to the Web 2.0 paradigm, the discourse about crowdsourcing often similarly frames the latter as transformatively empowering a larger number of connected citizens and users through the enhanced degree of participation and collaboration it supposedly affords. The body of crowdsourcing literature analyzed in this chapter will cut across various fields and encompass a diverse mixture of popular and academic texts, so as to highlight the pervasiveness and extensive reach of several key assertions about crowdsourcing within North American society. Moreover, this analysis will unveil several of the key associations present within crowdsourcing discourse, whether they emerge within the more popular and professional context of newspapers and business-oriented literature or within academic publications. More specifically, some of the elements often articulated with crowdsourcing since its popularization in 2006 by Jeff Howe and Mark Robinson include: 1) an impression of novelty and experimental innovation; 2) a deterministic vision of technologically-enabled transformation and disruption within society and various industries; 3) a democratization of citizens' participation and collaboration within the realm of creative production that further empowers and benefits them and businesses, but which necessitates that crowdsourcing organizers forfeit a substantive degree of control; 4) the suggestion that the productivity of a disorganized crowd of amateurs needs to be flexibly managed by professional individuals and businesses, thus creating an amateur-professional dichotomy; 5) a beneficial and more collaborative form of production driven by the

goals shared by a passionate online community rather than monetary interests; and lastly, 6) a communal image of global unity that includes a truly diverse range of participants, ideas, and knowledge. Finally, this chapter will also examine popular commentary and academic scholarship in order to highlight emerging criticism of crowdsourcing, especially its use in media production, and of the core articulations uncovered within its surrounding discourse, so as to contextualize the following chapters' critical analyses of the *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut* projects.

More importantly, this discourse analysis is also essential in order to detail how the similarly affectively laden and contagious promises of empowerment, democratic inclusion, and communal unity contained within the more utopian versions of crowdsourcing rhetoric can attract online users into participating in crowdsourcing projects like *Life in A Day* and *Star Wars Uncut*. While the latter case study also strategically attempts to harness the pre-existing affect of *Star Wars* fans as a means to further increase participation, the intersecting affective and ideological appeal of crowdsourcing discourse's core claims and promises will be shown in this chapter to be an important element of its open call. In addition, this critical examination of crowdsourcing discourse will also underline its complementary ideological function of masking — through its rhetoric about collaboration and community — the top-down hierarchies, power relations, and forms of inequality that frequently result from this Web 2.0 practice. Through the analysis of this other manifestation of Web 2.0 discourse, this chapter will demonstrate how the intersection of ideological misrepresentation and affect within crowdsourcing discourse — as part of a larger apparatus' strategies of control — contributes to the reproduction of an increasingly communication-driven mode of neoliberal capitalism and its more flexible paradigm of control by similarly encouraging a crowd of online users to adopt a productive form of individualistic subjectivity and to participate in crowdsourcing, so it can be harnessed to the primary benefit of other corporate interests.

The Origins of Crowdsourcing as a Concept

Initially, the concept of crowdsourcing was coined by *Wired* writer Jeff Howe in conjunction with his editor Mark Robinson during a conversation occurring in January 2006,⁶⁷¹ but the term would only be further popularized following his publication of an article within

⁶⁷¹Jeff Howe, "Crowdsourcing: A Definition," *Crowdsourcing*, June 2nd, 2006, http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/cs/2006/06/crowdsourcing_a.html

Wired and a blog post clarifying the term's definition during June 2006.⁶⁷² In this latter post, Howe distinguishes his novel concept from Benkler's notion of commons-based peer production due to its similarities with it, although he views the former as a part of crowdsourcing.⁶⁷³ Afterwards, however, he defines crowdsourcing more specifically as “the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call.”⁶⁷⁴ He also importantly stresses how Surowiecki's notion of the "wisdom of the crowd" popularized in his 2004 book was a direct influence on the concept.⁶⁷⁵ By connecting the practice to outsourcing through its name and recognizing the project initiator's possible status as a business company within the above definition, Howe importantly acknowledges the potential commercial dimension of crowdsourcing from the outset, even though later sources of commentary on the topic including his own would often minimize its possible use by capitalistic interests as a means to exploit user labour. Moreover, his characterization of the crowd's composition as "undefined" also positions crowdsourcing as an inclusive practice that enables a larger amount of citizens to participate in a project. In his 2008 book *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, he further describes crowdsourcing as emerging from: the influence of the open source movement; the increasing accessibility of amateurs to the means of production afforded by digital networks and technologies; and the rising organizational force embodied by online communities.⁶⁷⁶ While ultimately viewing its benefits as outweighing its costs, Howe also characterizes crowdsourcing as a radically disruptive and novel creative practice that enables the harnessing of humanity's untapped talent and knowledge to a never-before-seen degree and constructs an increasingly global labour force by supposedly ignoring existing geographical borders.⁶⁷⁷ Complementing this portrait, the expression “the Power of the Crowd” present within his book's subtitle also suggests that the crowd formed through crowdsourcing carries its own power that is then unleashed through this process, thus further empowering its participating

⁶⁷² Jeff Howe, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," *Wired*, June 1st, 2006, <https://www.wired.com/2006/06/crowds/>; Jeff Howe, "Crowdsourcing: A Definition," *Crowdsourcing*, June 2nd, 2006, http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/cs/2006/06/crowdsourcing_a.html

⁶⁷³ Jeff Howe, "Crowdsourcing: A Definition," *Crowdsourcing*, June 2nd, 2006, http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/cs/2006/06/crowdsourcing_a.html

⁶⁷⁴Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶Jeff Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, (New York: Crown Business, 2008), 8, 11, 71, 99-100, 103.

⁶⁷⁷Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 16-17, 19.

members. Supporting this suggestion, his book again parallels certain aspects of Web 2.0 discourse when he presents crowdsourcing as a democratizing and inclusive force that holds "the capacity to form a sort of perfect meritocracy" because:

.... Gone are pedigree, race, gender, age, and qualification. What remains is the quality of the work itself. In stripping away all considerations outside quality, crowdsourcing operates under the most optimistic of assumptions: that each one of us possess a far broader, more complex range of talents than we can currently express within current economic structures.⁶⁷⁸

Other later commentators on the topic of crowdsourcing within a variety of literary sources would further echo Web 2.0 discourse and similarly associate the concept with a neutral and meritocratic conception of inclusivity and empowerment. Through the reproduction of this association, crowdsourcing would be connected to an unfolding and increasingly visible narrative about its potential to meritocratically empower and liberate individuals due to the supposedly unbiased character of the practice and the Web itself as well as the anonymous participation they both can afford.⁶⁷⁹

In other sections of this book, Howe continues to characterize crowdsourcing using Web 2.0 rhetoric by presenting it as a process that specifically benefits and empowers amateur creators and functions as an inclusive alternative to the gatekeeping and hierarchical control over creative production often undertaken and possessed by an elite few within society.⁶⁸⁰ Although he repeatedly stresses how the connected crowd also includes professionals and underlines the importance of diversity to crowdsourcing's success akin to Surowiecki's "wisdom of the crowd,"⁶⁸¹ Howe predominantly frames crowdsourcing as a process that is driven by the passion of amateurs and enables the latter's value to be better appreciated, thus seemingly empowering them in a more substantive manner.⁶⁸² Furthermore, echoing the discursive tendency to associate

⁶⁷⁸Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 13-14.

⁶⁷⁹ Echoing this vision of crowdsourcing as a meritocratic process that frees participants from the constraints of identity, scholar Daren C. Brabham has implied elsewhere in a 2008 article for the journal *Planning Theory* that crowdsourcing holds the potential to "liberate people from the constraints of identity politics and performative posturing by endowing users with the possibility for anonymity in participatory functions." See Daren C. Brabham, "Crowdsourcing the Public Participation Process for Planning Projects," *Planning Theory* 8, no. 3 (2009): 250. A few years later, this idealistic image of the practice would persist in a 2013 article for *Mix* magazine by writer Markkus Rovito wherein he claims the "true value of crowdsourcing" as the creation of "a meritocracy where the best rise to the top and are then rewarded." See Markkus Rovito, "Community Outreach," *Mix*, 37.2. (Feb 2013): 34.

⁶⁸⁰Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 204, 246.

⁶⁸¹ Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 28, 135, 143.

⁶⁸² Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 23, 39-40.

the Web 2.0 paradigm with a world-spanning conception of collaboration, he also represents crowdsourcing as enabling, through technology, a global form of collaboration between a diverse array of connected citizens.⁶⁸³ Aside from collaboration between users, he also argues that crowdsourcing cultivates collaborative relationships “between companies and customers” that exemplify a shift toward “greater democratization in commerce.”⁶⁸⁴ Echoing Web 2.0 discourse's core associations since its inception, the concept of crowdsourcing — as has been demonstrated within this paragraph — was similarly associated by Howe with the democratization of participation within the realm of creative production and the transformative inclusion and empowerment of previously excluded citizens, amateurs, and demographic groups.

Elsewhere in this same text, Howe again parallels Web 2.0 discourse's propensity to stress the intrinsic motivations of online users by characterizing contributors to crowdsourcing projects as being predominantly motivated by either the intrinsic desire to participate itself or “a deep commitment to the community.”⁶⁸⁵ However, he does also recognize that financial rewards are often offered to crowdsourcing participants and states that the participants of the online crowd are frequently motivated by a desire for a form of ownership over its products and that they will only contribute labour if a substantive exchange of value occurs with project organizers.⁶⁸⁶ Despite these qualifications though, Howe's description of crowdsourcing in his 2008 book predominantly characterizes crowdsourcing participants as being driven by intrinsic motivations and community rather than situating them as co-creators worthy of some form of financially payment — a characterization that makes them less likely to be financially compensated and empowered in a more substantive manner. Akin to Web 2.0 rhetoric, Howe's association of the crowdsourcing crowd with a notion of community and intrinsic motives would eventually become an important element of crowdsourcing discourse that would re-appear within a wider range of literature and commentary about the practice.

Howe's popular book also parallels Web 2.0 discourse's frequent understanding of user-generated content and productivity as valuable resources to be properly guided and harnessed, often by the corporate owners of social media platforms — a conception that echoes and complements post-industrial neoliberal capitalism's rhetoric of flexible management and

⁶⁸³Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 14.

⁶⁸⁴Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 14.

⁶⁸⁵Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 15.

⁶⁸⁶Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 16, 196.

heightened worker autonomy while supporting the actualization of this new mode of soft control and value extraction within Western society. More specifically, within this text, Howe reflects this understanding by asserting that the connected crowd of individuals participating in a crowdsourcing project always requires 'benevolent dictators' or leaders to successfully direct it, frequently in support of business interests.⁶⁸⁷ Years after Howe's intervention, other writers on the topic such as Renee Hopkins in a 2011 instructional anthology *A Guide to Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing* would make similar claims and also declare that crowdsourcing always requires leaders to guide it.⁶⁸⁸ As will be seen later in this chapter and this dissertation's final case studies, this leadership would often come to be conceived as being inhabited by professionals while the crowd to be managed is frequently positioned as a collection of disorganized amateurs. Crowdsourcing discourse's regular emphasis on the necessity of proper leadership for the successful deployment of the practice supports Brabham's conclusion that more business-oriented literature focusing on crowdsourcing like that of Howe himself often concentrates to a greater degree on “the strategic and managerial dimensions of integrating crowdsourcing into a firm's operations.”⁶⁸⁹ Despite Howe's minimal acknowledgment of these types of hierarchies within crowdsourcing, his affective passion for the practice still compels him to idealistically and somewhat paradoxically describe it within his early writing on the topic — deploying many of the same associations found within other Web 2.0 rhetoric — as a radically inclusive, collaborative, democratizing, community-driven, and global process that can empower a wider range of participating citizens. This affectively charged and idealistic framing of crowdsourcing would prove to be highly attractive and, as a result, would quickly expand beyond the work of Howe and start to be expressed within the contemporaneous and later publications of various other commentators and writers. More importantly, while often being bolstered by the affective passion of some of its subsequent contributors, this more utopian discourse about crowdsourcing — as part of a larger apparatus of control within communicative capitalism — would ultimately mask and minimize the hierarchical power relations, the inequality, and the shaping influence of capitalistic interests that are often attached to the practice, so as to better attract and channel the productive participation of online users for profit.

⁶⁸⁷Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 284, 287.

⁶⁸⁸Renee Hopkins, “What is Crowdsourcing?” *A Guide to Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing: Advice from Leading Experts*, ed. Paul Sloane, (Philadelphia, PA: Koran Page, 2011), 20-21.

⁶⁸⁹Daren C. Brabham, *Crowdsourcing* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 55.

The Character of Discourse about Crowdsourcing and the Attempts to Define It

Surfacing after Howe's early work on crowdsourcing and alongside it, various and diverse sources of academic and popular commentary would continue to similarly frame crowdsourcing as a transformative, participatory, and collaborative practice that empowers both participants and businesses. In spite of this tendency, it should be noted that, within this emerging body of literature, crowdsourcing rarely has a stable meaning. While increasingly to the language of the Web 2.0 paradigm, it was often arbitrarily associated with open source production, peer production, and open innovation, but also, in some cases, social media platforms. For example, in his 2006 publication *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*, *Wired* contributor Chris Anderson writes of crowdsourcing almost interchangeably with Yochai Benkler's term 'peer production' and misguidedly attributes the latter's notion of self-governance to the practice.⁶⁹⁰ Moreover, in other texts, crowdsourcing can often be described as a potentially profitable business model or as an alternative to this very model. Furthermore, different definitions of the practice often disagree about whether or not crowdsourcing is actually an online practice or about the composition of the participating crowd and project organizers. In many cases, the word "crowd" is rarely deployed to describe the group of participants contributing to a crowdsourcing project. Instead, alternative terms like "community," which ascribe a more unified and positive character to this group, are used in conversations about the practice, which frequently talk about the participants and users composing this group in a manner that preserves, whether intentionally or not, their individuality to a greater degree than the word "crowd." However, when engaging with the growing amount of academic literature on the practice and the varying definitions of it they circulate within society, certain scholars have sought to synthesize and create a more comprehensive and definitive conception of crowdsourcing.⁶⁹¹ For example, drawing on a wide range of texts with this intention, Enrique Estellés-Arolas and Fernando González-Ladrón-de-Guevara have defined crowdsourcing as a: “participative online activity in which an individual, an institution, a non-

⁶⁹⁰Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*, (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 219.

⁶⁹¹For examples of this trend, see David Geiger et al. “Managing the Crowd: Towards a Taxonomy of Crowdsourcing Processes,” in *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Americas Conference on Information Systems*, paper 430, (Detroit, Michigan, 2011), 1-11, http://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1396&context=amcis2011_submissions; Enrique Estellés-Arolas and Fernando González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, “Towards an Integrated Crowdsourcing Definition,” *Journal of Information Science* 38, no. 2 (2012): 189-200, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551512437638>.

profit organization, or company proposes to a group of individuals of varying knowledge, heterogeneity, and number, via a flexible open call, the voluntary undertaking of a task.”⁶⁹² Moreover, within this definition, they also assert that the "undertaking of the task, of variable complexity and modularity, and in which the crowd should participate bringing their work, money, knowledge and/or experience, always entails mutual benefit.”⁶⁹³ Attempting to construct a similarly neutral definition, Brabham describes crowdsourcing as a process containing four elements: 1) “an organization that has a task it needs performed; 2) “a community (crowd) that is willing to perform the task voluntarily”; 3) “an Online environment that allows the work to take place and the community to interact with the organization”; and 4) “mutual benefit for the organization and the community.”⁶⁹⁴ He also states that crowdsourcing necessitates control over the production of content and ideas to be shared between an organization and a community, thus producing “a shared process of bottom-up, open creation by the crowd and top-down management by those charged with serving an organization's strategic interests.”⁶⁹⁵ However, a key issue with these attempts at an objective definition is that they often frame a mutually beneficial relationship between project organizers and the crowd as the default. Despite often recognizing the top-down management that does occur within the crowdsourcing process, the above conception of crowdsourcing as a mutually beneficial practice that involves "shared" control over production, if believed, has the potential to dismissively frame inequality and power differences within a crowdsourcing project as confirmation that the latter is an inauthentic manifestation or an anomalous one. In this sense, discursive attempts at objectively defining crowdsourcing can often unintentionally replicate some of the more idealistic associations attached to the practice within rhetoric about it — in particular, the articulation of crowdsourcing with an egalitarian conception of collaboration deemed to be empowering for participants, as seen earlier within Howe's foundational commentary.

In fact, despite the above attempts to provide a more objective understanding of crowdsourcing, many popular and academic texts ranging from newspapers and journals to books and websites would persist in linking the practice with a utopian narrative of transformative empowerment and inclusion within media production and the creative realm in

⁶⁹² Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, “Towards an Integrated Crowdsourcing Definition,” 197.

⁶⁹³ Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, “Towards an Integrated Crowdsourcing Definition,” 197.

⁶⁹⁴ Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 3.

⁶⁹⁵ Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, xxi.

general. As a complementary part of Web 2.0 discourse, this more utopian discourse about crowdsourcing, which associates the former with attractive notions of democratization, inclusion, and empowerment, similarly functions as an affective-discursive strategy within the same apparatus of control previously detailed throughout this dissertation — a strategy that ultimately supports the reproduction of the flexible mode of control at the center of the twenty first century's communicative incarnation of neoliberal capitalism now found within North America and beyond. Its primary role within this apparatus is to compel online users —through the affective and ideological appeal of the discourse of transformative empowerment surrounding crowdsourcing — into participating in a crowdsourcing project with organizers and adopting a flexible, creative, and neoliberal form of individualistic and productive subjectivity that would render them more likely to freely offer their labour to such a project for little to no financial compensation. Moreover, it also drives them into voluntarily entering into unequal and hierarchical power relations with professional organizers within crowdsourcing projects. In the rest of this chapter, the dominant elements articulated with crowdsourcing within popular and academic literature and their affective and ideological dimensions will be described and analyzed in order to account for why online users might be attracted into participating within a crowdsourcing project. This incarnation of Web 2.0 discourse and its core elements will also be critically examined in order to explain how they specifically contribute to the reproduction of unequal power relations and hierarchies within a twenty first century online media ecosystem increasingly driven by the productivity of connected users. As already outlined in an earlier paragraph, these features include: a suggestion of novelty; a vision of radical and disruptive change; a transformative democratization of participation within the creative process; a flexible form of leadership and control that rests on binary between amateur participants and professional organizers; a highly beneficial incarnation of collaborative and communal production; and a sense of global connection and communal unity.

Crowdsourcing and the Narrative of Novelty

Despite the frequent characterization of crowdsourcing as a novel twenty first century phenomenon that holds the potential to transform various social fields, several sources of commentary on the practice do not conceive of it as an online activity that only recently came into existence. For instance, in a 2011 article of *Communications of the ACM*, a monthly magazine intended for a broad readership of computing professionals, author Samuel Greengard

would declare that the “roots of crowdsourcing extend back into the 1990s” back “when individuals and institutions began volunteering spare computing cycles to help solve major research projects.”⁶⁹⁶ Likewise, within their instructional book on how businesses can best deploy crowdsourcing, *Getting Results from Crowds* (2011), Ross Dawson and Steve Bynghall would extend crowdsourcing's origins even further back than Greengard and declare its earliest appearances to be the British Government's inclusive offering of a 20,000 pound prize in 1714 to the nation's citizens in order to produce a “reliable method of calculating a ship's longitude” along with King Louis XVI's similar offering in 1783 France of a monetary “prize for producing alkali from sea salt.”⁶⁹⁷ Other texts would continue to question the perception of crowdsourcing as a novel phenomenon at the same time as they attributed a sense of novelty to its new Web-enabled incarnation. Exemplifying this tendency is an earlier 2007 article within *InfoWorld*, a magazine for business professionals, where writer Lena West would argue that “crowdsourcing” or “the idea of tapping external collaborators to develop or enhance products and services is far from revolutionary,” even though she would concede that the ease with which an organization can expand the scope of the crowd's collective intelligence via the twenty first century Web is indeed “revolutionary.”⁶⁹⁸ Making similar forms of qualifications, academic texts after 2006 would also present crowdsourcing as an evolution from older trends, but stress its novel embodiment as an online practice shaped by the Web 2.0 paradigm. For instance, in a 2008 article for the scholarly journal *Science, Technology & Innovation Studies*, Frank Kleemann, G. Gunter Volt, and Kerstin Rieder would declare that crowdsourcing is “a quantitative expansion of the older trend toward integrating consumers in productive processes” and differentiate it as “a new form of consumer integration” which “has come into its own only with the advent of Web 2.0.”⁶⁹⁹ In this article, crowdsourcing is thus seen as indebted to past commercial forms of value creation with consumers, but also as a novel Web 2.0 version of this trend.⁷⁰⁰ Similarly, Stuart

⁶⁹⁶ Samuel Greengard, “Following the Crowd,” *Communications of The ACM* 54, no. 2 (February 2011): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1897816.1897824>.

⁶⁹⁷ Ross Dawson and Steve Bynghall, *Getting Results from Crowds: the Definitive Guide to Using Crowdsourcing to Grow your Business* (Sydney: Advanced Human Technologies, 2011), 10.

⁶⁹⁸ Lena West, “Mob wisdom means business; So-called ‘crowdsourcing’ lets companies create massive focus groups, garner fresh ideas, and even predict the future,” *InfoWorld Daily News*, December 10th, 2007, <http://www.infoworld.com/article/2648903/application-development/mob-wisdom-means-business.html>

⁶⁹⁹ Frank Kleemann, G. Gunter Voss, and Kerstin Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators: the commercial utilization of consumer work through crowd- sourcing,” *Science Technology & Innovation Studies* 4, no. 1 (2008): 23, <http://www.sti-studies.de/ojs/index.php/sti/article/view/81/>.

⁷⁰⁰ Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators: the commercial utilization of consumer work through

MacDonald and Nicola Osborne in a 2013 article for the *Journal of Map & Geography Libraries* would claim that crowdsourcing has existed since the nineteenth century, but that it has been expanded to a global scale by the Web and its 2.0 manifestation.⁷⁰¹ Thus, diverse sources of commentary about crowdsourcing could occasionally undercut the tendency to associate the practice with novelty, but some of them would also re-introduce it by framing its online incarnation in similar terms or linking it with the novel concept of Web 2.0.

Building on this latter articulation within this emerging body of literature, a significant amount of less academic commentary about crowdsourcing would reinforce the image of novelty associated with the practice by explicitly conceiving it as an online phenomena and more specifically associating it with the Web 2.0 paradigm. For example, in a 2008 piece published on the *San Francisco Chronicle's* website *SFGate* by George Raine, crowdsourcing ventures are framed as a sign of traditional businesses embracing "Web 2.0 philosophy" and its related concept of the 'wisdom of the crowds'.⁷⁰² In addition, a 2010 article on the CNN website by reporter Barry Nelid would define crowdsourcing as the "concept of farming work out to a web-based community" and claim that it was "popularized as part of the so-called web 2.0 era of internet participation."⁷⁰³ Similarly connected to the concept of Web 2.0 and its user-centric language, in a *ZDNET* post published by Dion Hinchcliffe during the same year, crowdsourcing is described as a "new and slightly different take on user generated content."⁷⁰⁴ Likewise, in a 2010 article for the web magazine *CMS Wire*, tech journalist Tsvetanka Stoyanova presents crowdsourcing as a Web 2.0 phenomena that, along with other manifestations, is currently changing the lives of citizens.⁷⁰⁵ In a 2011 article about crowdsourced art for the *Christian Science Monitor*, Carol Strickland situates the novel adoption of crowdsourcing by artists as the product of them experimenting with "Web 2.0 culture" since 2002 onwards.⁷⁰⁶ In all of these

crowd- sourcing," 19-20, 23.

⁷⁰¹Stuart MacDonald and Nicola Osborne, "Addressing History: Crowdsourcing A Nation's Past," *Journal of Map & Geography Libraries*, 9.1-2 (Jan 1 2013): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15420353.2013.768191>.

⁷⁰² George Raine, "More Businesses Considering 'Wisdom of crowds'", *SFGate*, July 20th, 2008, <http://www.sfgate.com/business/article/More-businesses-considering-wisdom-of-crowds-3204211.php>

⁷⁰³ Barry Nelid, "Can Crowdsourcing Reconnect with the Crowd?", *CNN*, November 2nd, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/BUSINESS/11/12/crowdsourcing.business/>

⁷⁰⁴ Dion Hinchcliffe, "Made on the Web, Designed by Us," *ZDNet*, August 17th, 2010, <http://www.zdnet.com/article/made-on-the-web-designed-by-us/>

⁷⁰⁵ Tsvetanka Stoyanova, "The Pros and Cons of Crowdsourcing Your Development Work," *CMS Wire*, November 23rd, 2010, <http://www.cmswire.com/cms/enterprise-20/the-pros-and-cons-of-crowdsourcing-your-development-work-009327.php>

⁷⁰⁶ Carol Strickland, "Crowdsourcing: The Art of a Crowd," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 14th, 2011,

instances, crowdsourcing, including its artistic incarnation, is imbued with a sense of newness through its expressed connection to the seeming novelty of the Web 2.0 paradigm.

This discursive association of crowdsourcing with the Internet or the Web 2.0 paradigm and, by extension, an image of novelty also extends to the work of scholars critically assessing the practice and, often more specifically, its potential benefits and flaws for businesses and marketers. For example, Paul Whitla in a 2009 article of the *Contemporary Management Research Journal* proclaims that the “impetus for crowdsourcing arises out of the movement which has come to be generically known as Web 2.0.”⁷⁰⁷ Even though he acknowledges that “crowdsourcing is not altogether new,” his association of the practice's rising popularity with the concept of Web 2.0. still lends it a degree of novelty.⁷⁰⁸ Moreover, in a taxonomy of crowdsourcing within a 2010 conference paper, scholar Anne C. Rouse would similarly link the practice to Web 2.0. tools and the Internet.⁷⁰⁹ Likewise, in a 2012 article for the journal *Business and Information Systems Engineering*, Larissa Hammon and Hajo Hippner also portray it as a new type of value creation that is connected to an online environment and highlight the important role of Web 2.0 applications to its deployment.⁷¹⁰ Lastly, in a 2014 article for the journal *Information, Communication and Technology* on crowdsourced surveillance, scholar Daniel Trottier would also connect crowdsourcing “with the rise of Web 2.0.”⁷¹¹ Cutting across popular commentary and scholarship, crowdsourcing tends to be framed as a new online phenomena and understandably associate it with the Web 2.0 paradigm, all of which confers and reinforces the sense of novelty already linked to the concept of crowdsourcing itself.

As will be illustrated in the next chapter's case study analysis of *Life in a Day*, another way that discourse about crowdsourcing characterizes the practice as being novel involves the way that the organizers of crowdsourcing ventures, including those focused on the production of media, initially describe the projects themselves for a larger audience of potential participants. Often, this cultivated image of novelty is partially constructed by organizers through their

<http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Arts/2011/0114/Crowdsourcing-The-art-of-a-crowd>

⁷⁰⁷Paul Whitla, “Crowdsourcing and its Application in Marketing Activities,” *Contemporary Management Research* 5, no. 1 (March 2009): 17, <http://www.cmr-journal.org/article/viewFile/1145/2641>.

⁷⁰⁸Whitla, “Crowdsourcing and its Application in Marketing Activities,” 26.

⁷⁰⁹Anne C. Rouse, “A Preliminary Taxonomy of Crowdsourcing,” in *ACIS 2010 Proceedings*, vol. 76, (2010), 2, 6, <http://aisel.aisnet.org/acis2010/76>.

⁷¹⁰ Larissa Hammon and Hajo Hippner, “Crowdsourcing,” *Business & Information Systems Engineering* 4, no. 3 (June 2012): 164-165, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11576-012-0321-7>.

⁷¹¹ Daniel Trottier, “Crowdsourcing CCTV surveillance on the Internet,” *Information, Communication, and Society*, 17, no. 5 (May 2014): 611, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.808359>.

ascription of an experimental and innovative character to such projects within the latter's open call or public statements about them. For example, this tendency can be witnessed within the textual descriptions for a crowdsourced art project that was initially titled *Gesamt* (2012), but ultimately named *Disaster 501: What Happened to Man?* and which was produced by controversial film auteur Lars von Trier and directed by filmmaker Jenle Hallund. This project demanded online participants to create five minute films responding to six provocative works of art by artists like Paul Gauguin, James Joyce, Albert Speer, Sammy Davis Jr., Cesar Franck, and Strindberg.⁷¹² After some curation by Hallund, the chosen submissions would result in a 45 minute film. More relevant for the purpose of this chapter section is that *Gesamt*, in its open call, presented itself as a novel enterprise by characterizing itself as “a cinematic experiment.”⁷¹³ Further reflecting this tendency, director Chris Jones would frame his crowdsourced film *50 Kisses* (2014) — an anthology film composed of 50 shorts created by writers and filmmakers from the crowd and all featuring a kiss in their narrative — as a “social film-making and scripting experiment” during its crowdsourcing campaign in 2012.⁷¹⁴ Through this discursive characterization of such crowdsourcing projects as experiments, the crowdsourcing process itself is, by extension, strongly positioned as a novel and innovative phenomenon despite the existence of on- and offline precursors within the creative realm.

However, one of the most important means through which this image of novelty was discursively attached to crowdsourcing within popular commentary and scholarship would follow in Howe's footsteps and involved representing crowdsourcing as a practice that was going to radically change, transform, and disrupt various fields of production within society and the world itself through its products. Embodying this narrative within a 2009 article of *Business Week* is writer John Winsor who asserted that crowdsourcing will “usher in radical changes to business models and business systems.”⁷¹⁵ Similarly, in a 2013 piece for the *Wall Street Journal*, Vivek Wadhwa would claim that crowdsourcing allows citizens to collaborate together in a way

⁷¹² Jonathan Robbins, “All Together Now: Disaster 501: What Happened to Man?” *Film Comment*, November 5th, 2012, <http://www.filmcomment.com/entry/disaster-501-what-happened-to-man>

⁷¹³ Nick Newman, “Lars von Trier Issues Challenge to Recreate Famous Art with 'Gesamt,'” *The Film Stage*, August 13th, 2012, <http://thefilmstage.com/news/lars-von-trier-issues-challenge-to-recreate-famous-art-with-gesamt/>

⁷¹⁴ Chris Jones, “Getting to the 50,” *50 Kisses Film*, August 3rd, 2012, <http://www.50kissesfilm.com/2012/08/03/getting-to-the-50/>

⁷¹⁵ John Winsor, “Crowdsourcing: What it Means for Innovation,” *Business Week*, June 15th, 2009, http://www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/jun2009/id20090615_946326.htm

that “not only disrupt industries, but will also change societies.”⁷¹⁶ In a 2015 article for the monthly magazine *Scientific Computing's* website, Michael Morris adopted similar rhetoric when stating that “the top crowdsourcing resources are transforming traditional development and creation” and that “the solutions that are created by leveraging the power of crowdsourcing may literally change the world.”⁷¹⁷ This vision of crowdsourcing's transformative potential, while less prevalent within academic writing, could also occasionally be felt within it. For example, in a 2010 article within the peer-reviewed journal *Research Technology Management*, James Euchner would echo the above commentators and present crowdsourcing as “a transformative capability.”⁷¹⁸ Moving across such different fields of literature and their readerships, this association of crowdsourcing with a notion of radical transformation and change grew to be more culturally pervasive and also contributed to the sense of novelty attached to the practice. It would also parallel and complement the similarly idealistic narratives of radical change tied to other collaboration-focused concepts like Surowiecki's the wisdom of the crowd or Levy's collective intelligence, both of which have come to be strongly connected to the Web 2.0 paradigm. More importantly, like the framing of Web 2.0 as a radically novel paradigm distinct from its past incarnation, this frequent representation of crowdsourcing as a novel online phenomena within the above literature similarly situates it as a separate, improved, empowering, and transformative version of pre-existing production practices like outsourcing.

Ultimately, the suggestion of novelty that is often attached to crowdsourcing works complements and supports the narrative of collaborative empowerment and participatory democratization that would also come to be associated with it by writers like Howe. Specifically, as with Web 2.0 discourse's reformulation of the old Web as an exaggerated counter-image to itself, this impression of novelty would distance crowdsourcing from the less collaborative hierarchies, restrictions, and forms of inequality and power relations between businesses, consumers, and citizens that were discursively ascribed to more traditional forms of industry production. Moreover, as a result of this distancing effect, it would mask the forms of power asymmetry that would often result between the project organizers of crowdsourcing projects and

⁷¹⁶ Vivek Wadhwa, “Weekend Read: Crowdsourcing is Overtaking Outsourcing,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 20th, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/accelerators/2013/12/20/weekend-read-crowdsourcing-is-overtaking-outsourcing>

⁷¹⁷ Michael Morris, “How Crowdsourcing can Solve Even Interstellar Problems,” *Scientific Computing*, May 5, 2015, <http://www.scientificcomputing.com/blogs/2015/05/how-crowdsourcing-can-solve-even-interstellar-problems>.

⁷¹⁸ James Euchner, “The Limits of Crowds,” *Research Technology Management* 53, no. 5 (Sept/Oct. 2010): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08956308.2010.11657644>.

their participating users. As part of a larger apparatus of control emerging within the twenty first century's user-driven online media ecosystem, this discourse's often hyperbolic characterization of crowdsourcing as a novel and transformative process and its masking of the continuous presence of asymmetrical power relations — functioning in tandem with the narrative of empowerment detailed in the following section — would also affectively and consciously attract users into participating within crowdsourcing projects and freely offering their labour for little in exchange. Partially elicited by the attraction of participating in a seemingly original enterprise, this voluntary participation within crowdsourcing projects — which often involve hierarchical power relationships that are not entirely different from industrial forms of top-down management and which predominantly benefit the interests of their organizers — would often render participants complicit in their reproduction. Thus, while contributing to the foundation on which rests the characterization of crowdsourcing as a revolutionary practice that is more empowering, inclusive, and collaborative than some of its precursors, the sense of novelty constructed through the discourse surrounding it is an instrumental component of crowdsourcing discourse and its strategic role in a wider apparatus seeking to encourage and flexibly channel the productivity of online users in service of neoliberal capital.

The Empowerment Narrative within Crowdsourcing Discourse

Supported by its articulation with an image of novelty and radical transformation, crowdsourcing was also frequently framed as having the capacity to include and empower a wider range of global citizens, especially within the commentary of Western newspapers, magazines, and their web platforms as well as business and management-oriented publications from 2006 onwards. Paralleling the utopian vision of participation linked to the Web 2.0 paradigm, crowdsourcing is often characterized within this emerging body of literature as empowering for citizens because it includes them within the process of creative production that was once the exclusive domain of industry experts and enables them to more substantively participate within it and collaborate with each other and with organizations and professionals to a greater degree. Exemplifying this tendency, in an early October 2006 article from the marketing magazine *Advertising Age's* website, writer Steve Rubel claims that, with crowdsourcing and new distribution channels, the “creative process is no longer centralized” and the participating “masses” can now “flex their creative muscles.”⁷¹⁹ Similarly, a month later in the business

⁷¹⁹ Steve Rubel, “Who's Ready to Crowdfund?” *Advertising Age* 77, no. 43 (October 23rd, 2006): 35.

entrepreneur magazine *Director*, writers like Matthew Stibbe would reinforce this narrative of greater inclusion by deploying a complementary rhetoric of democratization and associate crowdsourcing with expressions like the “democratic web” and the “internet of the people, by the people, and for the people.”⁷²⁰ Contributing to this growing articulation of crowdsourcing with a notion of democratized participation, George Raine in his 2008 *SFGate* article would also describe business-oriented crowdsourcing as a form of "retail democracy" because it includes a larger scale of participants within the idea contribution process.⁷²¹ In a later 2013 article for the *Harvard Business Review's* website, advertising firm CEO John Winsor would echo Raine's conception of crowdsourcing as a democratizing force and present its emergence as one of the causes of the "radical democratization of business over the last decade."⁷²² Further solidifying this image of crowdsourcing as a force of inclusion and democratization for citizens and businesses, in an article published on the website *Social Media Today*, author Tim Gilchrist would even characterize the "primary tenants of crowdsourcing" as being "inclusion," a wider "democracy of ideas," and "community" — an emphasis on community being another dominant element of crowdsourcing discourse that will be later addressed in this chapter.⁷²³ Similarly, in a 2010 article for *Wired*, Chris Anderson would situate crowdsourcing as part of a transformative shift towards the democratization of production and communication for citizens within manufacturing industries and on the Internet.⁷²⁴ Resituating this rhetoric of citizen empowerment within the governmental realm of public management, author Bill Annibell inside a 2010 article for the digital magazine *The Public Manager* would characterize crowdsourcing as an “empowering technology” for the "masses" because it enables their ideas to be “captured and voted on” and ultimately heard.⁷²⁵ Similarly, in a 2016 blog post for the magazine *Federal Computer Week*, Public Management professor Steve Kelman would parallel this vision of crowdsourcing and view it as contributing to "a democratization of organizational production"

⁷²⁰ See Matthew Stibbe, “All Contributions Welcome,” *Director* 60, no. 4 (November 1st, 2006): 76-81, EBSCOhost.

⁷²¹ George Raine, "More Businesses Considering 'Wisdom of crowds'", *SFGate*, July 20th, 2008, <http://www.sfgate.com/business/article/More-businesses-considering-wisdom-of-crowds-3204211.php>

⁷²² John Winsor, "The End of Traditional Ad Agencies," *Harvard Business Review*, May 9th, 2013, <https://hbr.org/2013/05/the-end-of-traditional-ad-agen>

⁷²³ Tim Gilchrist, "Crowdsourcing and Its Impact on New Product Development," *Social Media Today*, May 20th, 2008, <http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/crowdsourcing-and-its-impact-new-product-development>

⁷²⁴ Chris Anderson, "In the Next Industrial Revolution, Atoms Are the New Bits," *Wired*, January 25th, 2010, https://www.wired.com/2010/01/ff_newrevolution/

⁷²⁵ Bill Annibell, “The Future State of Collaboration,” *Public Manager* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 12.

and privileging "ordinary people over those at the top of our institutions."⁷²⁶ Likewise, in an earlier 2012 article for *The Independent*, commentator Jimmy Leach similarly conceives of "crowdsourcing platforms" as an empowering tool within politics by situating them as part of a wave of "democratic technologies" that give individual citizens the ability to more thoroughly participate in the political realm.⁷²⁷ Lastly, in a 2011 opinion piece for *The New York Times*, Tina Rosenberg would perpetuate this narrative of enhanced social participation by arguing that, if adopted by activist organizations, crowdsourcing could offer a "relatively new way for individuals to participate in social change."⁷²⁸ Thus, within a diverse range of emerging sources of Western commentary within a variety of different fields — commentary that sought to assess or highlight the potential benefits of crowdsourcing — crowdsourcing was often discursively framed as a democratizing force for citizens and businesses, which includes them and allows them to participate, to a significantly greater degree, within the creative processes of a vast range of socio-cultural, economic, and political realms — areas from which they were presented as being excluded or over which they were seen as possessing a less substantive amount of participatory input. Even critics of crowdsourcing during this period like Jaron Lanier and business professor Jeff DeGraff would perceive it as democratizing the participation of average citizens and amateurs within the realm of production and innovation while simultaneously criticizing the practice for it.⁷²⁹

Suggesting the wider reach of this type of crowdsourcing discourse, this pattern of associating crowdsourcing with the empowerment of citizens through the democratization of participation and collaboration within the realm of creativity and innovation is also present within scholarship, albeit to a lesser degree and with less affectively contagious enthusiasm. For instance, in an earlier 2008 article for *Planning Theory*, Brabham would claim that crowdsourcing incorporates "the transparent and democratizing elements of open source" into a

⁷²⁶ Steve Kelman, "Crowdsourcing: the Democratization of Organizational Production," *Federal Computer Week*, April 6th, 2016, <https://fcw.com/blogs/lectern/2016/04/kelman-crowdsourcing.aspx>

⁷²⁷ Jimmy Leach, "Clicking our Way to Democracy," *The Independent*, November 22nd, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/clicking-our-way-to-democracy-8343844.html>

⁷²⁸ Tina Rosenberg, "Crowdsourcing a Better World," *The New York Times*, March 28th, 2011, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/28/crowdsourcing-a-better-world/>

⁷²⁹ Jaron Lanier, "Why Crowdsourcing isn't Always Wise," Interview with Kim S. Nash, March 25th, 2010, <http://www.cio.com/article/2419478/consumer-technology/why-crowdsourcing-isn-t-always-wise.html>; Jeff DeGraff, "Why Crowdsourcing Has Ruined the Art of Innovation," *Huffington Post*, December 28th, 2015, updated on December 28th, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-degraff/why-crowdsourcing-has-rui_b_8885302.html

profitable business model.⁷³⁰ Furthermore, he would assert that, by enabling the crowd to participate in cultural production, it “can be quite empowering” and offer “a hopeful reunion of worker and product in a post-industrial economy of increasing alienation of labor.”⁷³¹ In a 2010 conference paper, Anne Rouse would reproduce a similar narrative of participatory inclusion when she asserts that crowdsourcing holds the “capacity to harness volunteers who might not otherwise be able to contribute” and democratically expand “the involvement of customers/users in the design and improvement of products, and in scientific and community projects.”⁷³² Reinforcing this association of crowdsourcing with a transformative new form of participatory inclusion, in a 2013 article for *Museum Journal* about its potential use within cultural heritage organizations, Trevor Owens pragmatically presents the practice as a potential means of inviting “the participation of amateurs [...] in the creation, development, and further refinement of public good.”⁷³³ Underlining the enhanced creative freedom that is frequently associated with the concept and which complements the above narrative of democratization, scholars Eric Schenk and Claude Guittard, within a 2011 article of the *Journal of Innovation Economics*, have highlighted how the concept of crowdsourcing itself often implies, even if misleadingly, the “voluntary participation of individuals, with no hierarchy or contract related constraint, as well as a high degree of autonomy in the achievement of tasks.”⁷³⁴ As illustrated by the above examples, scholarly analyses of crowdsourcing as a practice and concept also often engage in similarly optimistic claims about its potential to enable a wider range of individuals to participate in the creation of ideas and products as well as in public and community projects and goals.

Since the concept's emergence in 2006, the image of crowdsourcing as a phenomenon that democratically includes potential participants within the realm of creative production and empowers them would also be expressed within popular and academic publications that addressed the practice's adoption by corporations to source media content from online users. It was particularly present within texts focusing on the application of crowdsourcing to create promotional media and advertising for brands, particularly articles from marketing-focused

⁷³⁰Daren C. Brabham, “Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 82.

⁷³¹ Brabham, “Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases,” 84.

⁷³² Anne C. Rouse, “A Preliminary Taxonomy of Crowdsourcing,” in *ACIS 2010 Proceedings*, vol. 76, (2010), 3, <http://aisel.aisnet.org/acis2010/76>.

⁷³³ Trevor Owens, “Digital Cultural Heritage and the Crowd,” *Museum Journal* 56, no. 1 (January 2013): 123.

⁷³⁴ Eric Schenk and Claude Guittard, “Towards a characterization of crowdsourcing practices,” *Journal of Innovation Economics* 1, no. 7 (2011): 103, <https://doi.org/10.3917/jie.007.0093>.

magazines and journals like *Marketing Week*, *PRWeek*, *AdWeek*, and the *Journal of Advertising Research*.⁷³⁵ More relevant to this section of this dissertation is the increasing presence of this positive portrait of crowdsourcing's empowering potential for average citizens within literature about crowdsourcing's use to produce other types of art and media like film. For instance, in two interviews after Howe's coining of the concept in 2006, the New York-based artist and curator Andrea Grover would frame crowdsourcing and the digital technologies upon which it relies as enabling a larger range of individuals to collaborate and participate in the production of art while also asserting its radical potential to function as an alternative mode of production guided by affect and more intrinsic motives than commercial profit.⁷³⁶ Complementing this perspective, in a June 2007 article of the magazine *Digital Video*, filmmaker Lance Weiler would assert that crowdsourced filmmaking is part of the democratization of film production.⁷³⁷ Echoing this belief in the democratization of creative production afforded by media-based crowdsourcing, in a 2013 *Time* article, Genna Terranova, the Tribeca Film Festival's programming director, would describe the shift towards "crowdsourced content" as part of a novel movement where citizens are using technology to be part of the creative process.⁷³⁸ This discursive articulation of media-related crowdsourcing with the inclusive democratization of creativity is even expressed by filmmakers themselves about their own crowdsourced work. For example, in a 2009 article for *The New York Times*, Yair Landau, founder of Mass Animation, would proclaim his own

⁷³⁵ For examples of this type of democratic rhetoric within this popular and academic literature about advertising, see Louise Jack, "The People Take Over the Pitch," *Marketing Week*, (November 26th, 2009): 14-18; George Christodoulides, Colin Jevons, and Pete Blackshaw, "The Voice of the Consumer Speaks Forcefully in Brand Identity: User-Generated Content Forces Smart Marketers to Listen," *Journal of Advertising Research* 51, no. 1 (March 2011 Supplement): 108, <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-51-1-101-111>; Wil Merritt, "Crowdsourced Advertising: It's Not Just Cheap Labor," *Adotas.com*, Feb. 17th, 2012, <http://www.adotas.com/2012/02/crowdsourced-advertising-it's-not-just-cheap-labor/>; Glenn W. Griffin, "Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation: Ethical and Procedural Implications for Advertising Creativity," in *Ethical Issues in Communication Professions: New Agendas in Communication*, ed. Minette E. Drumwright (New York: Routledge, 2014), 186, 198; Michael Papay, "Democratization of brands is the industry's new normal," *PRweek*, U.S. ed, 17, no. 9, (Sep 2014): 22; and Gabriel Beltrone, "Canon's Michelle Fernandez Discovers Hollywood's Future Auteurs," *Adweek* 55, no. 35 (Sept. 29th, 2014): 50, ProQuest.

⁷³⁶ Andrea Grover, "Give it a Name: ApexArt Tries to Pinpoint an Art Movement," interview with Nicole Davis, *Downtown Express*, 19, no. 22 (October 13th-19th, 2006) http://www.downtownexpress.com/de_179/giveitaname.html; Andrea Grover, "(Q&A) Your Assignment: Art," Interview with Leah DeVun, *Wired*, July 9th, 2007, http://archive.wired.com/techbiz/media/news/2007/07/crowd_captain?currentPage=all

⁷³⁷ Lance Weiler, "Crowdsourcing," *Digital Video* 15, no. 6 (Jun 2007): 41-42.

⁷³⁸ Genna Terranova qtd. in Lily Rothman, "Donate Your Ideas: Movie Crowdsourcing Goes Beyond Money," *Time*, April 23rd, 2013, <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/04/23/donate-your-ideas-movie-crowdsourcing-goes-beyond-money/>

crowdsourced animated short film *Live Music* (2009) as a "step in the democratization of creative storytelling in Hollywood."⁷³⁹ Echoing Landau's vision of crowdsourcing as enabling others to participate and collaborative in the creative process, Mike Schneider — who curated and directed the film *Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated* (2009), which is entirely composed of crowdsourced animated segments of the original 1968 George Romero film — would position the project as an inclusive form of mass collaboration that could “give the audience a way to enter into the work.”⁷⁴⁰ Media crowdsourcing projects are thus often framed as empowering audiences, consumers, and citizens into participating and collaborating, in a more substantive manner, within media and cultural production.

Complementing this narrative of participatory empowerment within discourse about media-related crowdsourcing is the tendency to emphasize the relinquishing of a significant amount of control by project organizers to the crowd. Echoing the pre-existing rhetoric seen in the post-industrial management discourse of the past addressed in this dissertation's first chapter, this pattern of associating crowdsourcing projects with a decrease in control over production for the entities who initiate and manage them as well as with an increase in the creative autonomy of their participants is also present within commentary about media crowdsourcing projects including from their organizers. Exemplifying this trend is the commentary of director Paul Verhoeven about a Netherlands-based film crowdsourcing enterprise launched in 2011 and initially known as the Entertainment Experience project. In this project, which eventually resulted in Verhoeven's film *Tricked* (2012), participants were asked to write and submit an additional seven segments or scripts that continued the story of an initial script fragment written by Kim Van Kooten in order to create a complete screenplay of a fictional narrative that would then be adapted by several production teams as well as Verhoeven himself. Reflecting crowdsourcing discourse's frequent emphasis on the forfeiting of control to participants, during an interview, Verhoeven would describe his role within this crowdsourcing project as a collaborator tasked with following the crowd: “I don't make the final film... I follow the audience, basically the public.”⁷⁴¹ Complementing Verhoeven's misleading characterization of

⁷³⁹ Yair Landau qtd. in Brooks Barnes, "An Animated Film is Created Through Internet Consensus," *The New York Times*, July 15th, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/movies/16mass.html?_r=1&

⁷⁴⁰ Mike Schneider, “A Classic Gets Reanimated,” Interview by Batboy, *The Deadmontonian*, May 5th, 2009, <http://thededmontonian.blogspot.ca/2009/05/classic-gets-reanimated.html>

⁷⁴¹ Paul Verhoeven, “Interview: Paul Verhoeven on the 'Entertainment Experience,’” YouTube video, 6:33, posted by “Mipmarkets,” October 5th, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtp_CxoMpq0

his function as a director within his film crowdsourcing project, in a 2013 article for *Time* magazine, Lily Rothman would similarly claim that the directors of similar projects:

....don't have any control over what gets created. Instead, they control what portion of the material is good enough to include. It's as if the infinite monkeys with typewriters—the ones in the famous thought experiment that says they would eventually produce Shakespeare's work—had an editor. The combination of fans and machines becomes an artist; the artist becomes the curator.⁷⁴²

Thus, although Rothman concedes that directors retain control over the selection and editing process of a crowdsourced film, she, nevertheless, similarly minimizes and masks the amount of control that they still possess over the production process while exaggerating the amount of artistic control being accorded to participants within this latter creative phase. Even Chris Jones, the leading creator and director of the crowdsourced film *50 Kisses*, minimizes the authorial control he holds over the project:

As a crowd sourced project, no single entity carries the risk of production, or gets to dictate the creativity. For sure, I will be acting as the overall creative director when the film is edited together, but that is more about finding the best rhythm for the constituent pieces than it is about creative dictatorship. No, the film will be made by the crowd....⁷⁴³

Consequently, he argues that *50 Kisses* was produced not by him, but “by the people.”⁷⁴⁴

Although, as suggested earlier, the power over editing and curation typically held by the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects is often openly acknowledged, these organizers and other figures like Rothman still frequently tie crowdsourcing within their public statements to a narrative of participatory empowerment by discursively associating it with a less restrictive form of control that is more deferential to the creative autonomy and input of contributing citizens.

Surfacing within a wide range of texts addressing crowdsourcing from more accessible commentary to various forms of scholarship, this frequent articulation of crowdsourcing — whether related to the production of media or not — with the democratization of participation for citizens, the affordance of a greater degree of creative autonomy to them, and a participatory vision of citizen empowerment foregrounds the practice's connection to discourse about the Web

⁷⁴²Lily Rothman, “Donate Your Ideas: Movie Crowdsourcing Goes Beyond Money,” *Time*, April 23rd, 2013, <http://entertainment.time.com/2013/04/23/donate-your-ideas-movie-crowdsourcing-goes-beyond-money/>

⁷⁴³Chris Jones, “Do you want your film in cinemas in February next year? Read on... '50 Kisses.'” *Chris Jones Blog*. July 6th, 2012. <http://www.chrisjonesblog.com/2012/07/do-you-want-your-film-in-cinemas-in-february-next-year-50-kisses.html>

⁷⁴⁴Andreas Fuchs, “European Update,” *Film Journal International* 117, no. 3 (March 2014): 64.

2.0 paradigm and the idealistic vision of online participation and collaboration often found within it. Moreover, even though crowdsourcing has repeatedly been characterized as a collaborative practice since its inception by Howe, the narrative of citizen empowerment attached to it does not often explicitly center on group formations like the community, the crowd, or "the people" contributing to a crowdsourcing project, but also frequently refers to the individual participants, members, amateurs, and citizens who compose them — a lingering focus that still often discursively situates potential participants within an individualistic neoliberal subject position that is associated with greater creative agency and which supports communicative capitalism. This vision of empowerment for formerly excluded citizens and amateurs within the creative process perpetuated within crowdsourcing discourse thus reproduces Web 2.0 rhetoric's dual focus on both the individual and collaborative forms of empowerment supposedly enabled by platforms, practices, and projects informed by the paradigm's key principles. More importantly, it similarly functions as part of a larger apparatus composed of both discursive and non-discursive strategies that ultimately supports the above neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism. Situated as an element of this apparatus and as a complementary incarnation of Web 2.0 rhetoric, the affect-laden and attractive narrative of democratization and empowerment cultivated within discourse about crowdsourcing masks its capitalistic underpinnings and minimizes the hierarchical power relations between participants and organizers that often exist within the projects that deploy it. This ideological effect of crowdsourcing discourse coupled with the frequently passionately held and affectively contagious belief in the empowering potential of the practice — which is often expressed by the commentators who engage in this rhetoric about crowdsourcing — also strongly encourages and compels connected citizens to adopt the desirable creative subjectivity that this narrative promises and to participate in crowdsourcing projects for little to no compensation. Through the low-cost contributions of the participants lured by this discourse's misleading ideological vision of citizen empowerment and its affective appeal, the corporations organizing media crowdsourcing projects stand a greater chance of accumulating some form of profit or benefit, all of which supports the new mode of communicative capitalism they embody.

The Amateur-Professional Hierarchy within Crowdsourcing Discourse

Bolstered by the ideological support and passionate user participation provided by crowdsourcing discourse's narrative of inclusive democratization and empowerment, this user-

driven and communicative model of neoliberal capitalism also requires the discursive legitimation of particular hierarchies with media crowdsourcing participants in order for corporations to accumulate the largest possible share of benefits from their contributions. As a result, crowdsourcing discourse tends to construct a hierarchical binary between the participants and organizers of a crowdsourcing project, often framing the former as amateurs that need to be guided by the latter professionals. In some instances, however, published assessments of the practice — especially those found within marketing-focused magazines in the West — acknowledge that contributors to crowdsourcing projects or competitions often do include professionals and that the latter's high quality work is frequently what is selected by their organizers.⁷⁴⁵ In other cases, crowdsourcing is defined as involving a diverse crowd that includes professional and amateur participants. Exemplifying this tendency is *Graphic Arts Monthly* contributor Alex Lynch's conception of crowdsourcing as involving the distribution of a task “to a large group of people (including professionals and amateurs) rather than a single organization or person.”⁷⁴⁶

Despite this occasional acknowledgment of the professionals within the harnessed crowd, the above characterizations of crowdsourcing compete with other instances of commentary that privilege its amateur contributors, frame the crowd's members almost exclusively as amateurs, or associate them with the notion of amateurism. Reflecting this pattern's sheer pervasiveness, it manifests itself within different fields of literature from Western newspapers and magazines to more scholarly texts. For example, reporter Jack Kapica, in a 2006 article for *The Globe and Mail*, views crowdsourcing participants as being primarily composed of “a large number of unpaid or low-paid amateurs.”⁷⁴⁷ Likewise, in a later 2007 article in the same newspaper, Sean Wise describes crowdsourcing as occurring “when disparate groups of amateurs contribute to the creation of a product.”⁷⁴⁸ Addressing the subject of crowdsourced art within a written statement

⁷⁴⁵ To see articles that recognize the presence of such professionals within the crowd of crowdsourcing projects and their frequent success, see Louise Jack, “The People Take Over the Pitch,” *Marketing Week*, (November 26th, 2009): 15; Gordon Comstock, “Oi! Crowdsourcer My Tiny Peperami. And step on it!” *Creative Review*. Vol. 30. Issue 10. (Oct. 2010): 63.

⁷⁴⁶ Alec Lynch, “Leveraging The Power Of Crowds,” *Graphic Arts Monthly* 80, no. 11 (November 1st, 2008): 6, Factiva.

⁷⁴⁷ Jack Kapica, “The Crowd Sourcerer,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 13th, 2006, <https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/technology/the-crowd-sourcerer/article1107258/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>

⁷⁴⁸ Sean Wise, “Wise Word,” *The Globe and Mail*, January 3rd, 2007, last modified on March 31st, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/wise-words/article20391820/>

and an interview in 2006, Andrea Grover has even represented the crowd as being untrained and crowdsourcing itself as being about the embrace of the amateur who wishes to participate for the sake of it.⁷⁴⁹ Further echoing this characterization within a 2013 academic article of *Curator: The Museum Journal* addressing the potential usefulness of crowdsourcing to museum relationships is Nancy Proctor who argues that the practice's roots “lie in historic 'amateurism' and the role of amateurs in the literal sense of the 'lovers' who have supported cultural institutions and scientific research for centuries.”⁷⁵⁰ This pervasive vision of crowdsourcing as being mainly driven by amateurs is even partially replicated within the recent work of media studies scholars Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, which frames the practice as a way by which “media producers solicit insights and contributions from a large base of amateur or pro-amateur creators.”⁷⁵¹ Regardless of its source, this prevalent framing of the crowd strengthens the previously mentioned and similarly widespread narrative about crowdsourcing's capacity to democratically include all citizens into the production process, even as it obstructs them from discursively occupying the privileged role of professional ascribed to a project's organizers and being entitled to the rights and benefits that are usually accorded to this working identity.

This burgeoning amateur-professional dichotomy and hierarchy between the participants and the organizers of crowdsourcing projects — and its ultimately disempowering effect on amateur participants — would also be reinforced by other recurring elements within crowdsourcing discourse that co-exist with its narrative of citizen empowerment and inclusion. For instance, this hierarchical binary is strongly supported by what scholar W. Glenn Griffin perceives as the tendency of creative professionals to view the work of the supposedly amateur crowd as inferior to that of experts or as capable of being of lower quality.⁷⁵² This particular belief is often expressed within online and offline publications focused on business and advertising like *Brandweek* and *Marketing*.⁷⁵³ This cultivated dichotomy between the amateur

⁷⁴⁹Andrea Grover, "Phantom Captain: Art and Crowdsourcing," Curator's statement, *Apexart*, 2006, accessed August 18th, 2017, <http://www.apexart.org/exhibitions/grover.htm>; Nicole Davis, "Give it a Name: ApexArt Tries to Pinpoint an Art Movement," *Downtown Express*, 19, no. 22 (October 13th-19th, 2006). http://www.downtownexpress.com/de_179/giveitaname.html

⁷⁵⁰Nancy Proctor, "Crowdsourcing—an Introduction: From Public Goods to Public Good," *The Museum Journal* 56.1. (January 2013): 106.

⁷⁵¹Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, 247.

⁷⁵² See Griffin, "Crowdsourcing and Co-Creation: Ethical and Procedural Implications for Advertising Creativity," 192-193.

⁷⁵³ For examples where this type of judgment is present, see Todd Wasserman, "Tell your Customers to Crowdfund This," *Brandweek* 50, no. 37 (October 19th, 2009): 26, ProQuest; Scott Billings, "Open source: the art

participants of crowdsourcing projects and professionals is also reproduced inside numerous articles within business and technology-oriented magazines, newspapers, and online publications from 2006 onwards. Specifically, it is perpetuated within articles from these sources that specifically proclaim or highlight how crowdsourcing's seemingly democratizing inclusion and encouragement of low-cost content and ideas by amateurs will negatively disrupt established media industries like journalism which are driven by professionals as well as the individual lives of the latter.⁷⁵⁴ This devaluation of the productivity of the “amateur” crowd as inferior or a threat again secures the privileged status of professional ascribed to crowdsourcing project organizers and the more established creators who are often part of this group. It also further delegitimizes the potential demands of amateur participants for the benefits and rights that come with the former status while justifying their often subservient position in relation to such organizers.

Complementing the above claims, other sources of popular commentary about crowdsourcing also cultivate a very clear hierarchy between the crowd of participants viewed as amateurs and the organizers of crowdsourcing projects deemed professionals wherein the contributions of the former are characterized as objects to be controlled, shaped, and harnessed by the latter. For instance, in a 2006 article for the British newspaper *The Times*, Daniel Finkelstein reinforces a hierarchical conception of the previously mentioned amateur-professional binary through his characterization of crowdsourcing as a process where contributions can be “picked up from amateurs for use by professionals.”⁷⁵⁵ This hierarchical framing of participants as the mere contributors of material and, conversely, crowdsourcing organizers as professionals who possess the power to control and decide its ultimate use is also present within Western articles addressing the appropriation of crowdsourcing within journalism

of creative collaboration,” *Marketing*, April 13th, 2011, pg. 35; Wil Merritt, “Crowdsourced Advertising: It's Not Just Cheap Labor,” *Adotas.com*, Feb. 17th, 2012, <http://www.adotas.com/2012/02/crowdsourced-advertising-it's-not-just-cheap-labor/>

⁷⁵⁴ For examples, see Paul F. Roberts, “Welcome, Citizen Journalist,” *InfoWorld*, 29, no. 14 (April 2nd, 2007): 16, ProQuest; Adam Weinstein, “Stop the press releases! As newspapers recruit “citizen journalists” to fill their pages, flacks and hacks find an opening,” *Mother Jones*, 33, no. 1 (January 1st, 2008): 71; Scott Kirsner, “Crowdsourcing: Mining the masses for the next big thing,” *The Boston Globe*, May 20th, 2007, http://www.boston.com/business/technology/articles/2007/05/20/crowdsourcing_mining_the_masses_for_the_next_big_thing/?rss_id=Boston+Globe+--+Business+News; Ken Spencer Brown, “Mash-Ups, Web 2.0 Among '06 Top 'Ideas' Tech Trends Go Mainstream Year also saw emergence of crowdsourcing, for-profit open source, green tech,” *Investor's Business Daily*, January 2nd, 2007, A07; Bob Garfield, “Crowdsourcing's Democracy Loses Some Appeal When Your Rate Card is in Jeopardy,” *Advertising Age* 81, no. 27 (July 12th, 2010): 15.

⁷⁵⁵Daniel Finkelstein, “Farewell to Mass Political Parties and Top of the Pops: A Cautionary Tale,” *The Times*, July 12th 2006, T19.

wherein professional leadership and control is often depicted as necessary to guide, edit, and transform the contributed media of the amateur crowd into a useful form.⁷⁵⁶ At the same time, this discursive construction of the crowd as amateur contributors subservient to the professional organizers of crowdsourcing projects is also often paradoxically reinforced within Western sources of commentary and publications that frame such projects as collaborations between these forces or as embodying a hybrid model that combines both.⁷⁵⁷

Moreover, the construction of this type of hierarchical binary between amateur participants and organizers within crowdsourcing discourse is also highly indebted to the longstanding tendency within discussions of crowd-based formations to describe them as chaotic entities or phenomena in need of being controlled. According to Florian Alexander Schmidt, even though the concept of the crowd was eventually partially rehabilitated following the interventions of Surowiecki and Howe, it was initially represented as an unruly, irrational, and disruptive force in opposition to the purported rationality of the individual within the work of Charles Mackay and the crowd psychology of figures like Gustave Le Bon during the nineteenth century.⁷⁵⁸ More specifically, in his 1895 book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, Le Bon views the crowd as eradicating the heterogeneity and intelligence ascribed to individual personalities and compelling them to adopt a more homogeneous, unconscious, and irrational mode of thinking that gives rise to an uncivilized form of violence.⁷⁵⁹ Complementing this characterization, fellow late nineteenth century French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, as detailed by Ernesto Laclau, perceives every crowd as being informed by two co-dependent social logics, one

⁷⁵⁶For examples of this trend within early articles about crowdsourcing journalism, see Sheila Dabu, “Crowdsourcing: The Next Wave?” *Media* 13, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 20-21, ProQuest; Nolan Hamilton, “Crowdsourcing tests yield mixed results,” *PRWeek. U.S.*, July 30th, 2007, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1256793/crowdsourcing-tests-yield-mixed-results>; and Katherine Viner, “Welcome to the future: Journalism is broken, said a speaker at the Guardian’s recent lecture series. Is it?” *The Guardian*, June 23rd, 2008, 9.

⁷⁵⁷See Dan Kaufman, “Critical Mass,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 23rd, 2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/04/22/1177180456214.html>; Paula J. Hane, “Becoming more open, socially networked, and involved.(regulations for managing government information),” *Information Today.*, Vol. 24, Issue 5, (May 1st, 2007): pg. 7-12; Hamilton Nolan, “Media: Analysis - Crowdsourcing tests yield mixed results,” *PR Week US*, July 30th, 2007, <http://www.prweek.com/article/1256793/crowdsourcing-tests-yield-mixed-results>; Jeff Jarvis, “The pro-am approach to news gathering,” *The Guardian*, 22nd October 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/oct/22/mondaymediasection.mediaguardian14>

⁷⁵⁸Florian Alexander Schmidt, “For a Few Dollars More: Class Action Against Crowdsourcing,” *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on February 10th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014, <http://florianalexanderschmidt.de/for-a-few-dollars-more/>; Florian Alexander Schmidt, “For A Fistful of Dollars,” *Florianschmidt.co*, February 1st, 2013, <http://florianschmidt.co/for-a-fistful-of-dollars/>

⁷⁵⁹Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1952), 27-29, 32, 157.

of which is a more chaotic and ephemeral dimension akin to that described by Le Bon.⁷⁶⁰ As this type of thinking about crowds would circulate in the West through later English translations of Le Bon and Tarde's work, it would also persist later in other texts like the translated version of Elias Canetti's 1960 German book *Crowds and Power* wherein crowds are framed as a destructive force driven by a shared direction and goal that destroys the boundaries and differences that previously separated their members and makes them start to feel equal to each other.⁷⁶¹ However, eventually influencing the belief that successful deployments of crowdsourcing require professional organizers to hierarchically manage the crowd, such crowd theorists would implicitly present the chaotic nature of crowds as needing to be controlled while also suggesting how certain forms of professional leadership or types of leaders could be capable of beneficially guiding and controlling them. For instance, Le Bon would also view professional "specialists" as holding the capacity to direct mentally inferior crowds including assemblies away from destructive ends and irresponsible decisions.⁷⁶² While viewing crowds as always having a foundation "provided by the presence of a leader," Tarde would assert that the second social logic of crowds is more "organized, hierarchical, lasting and regular" and is associated with his organizational concept of the corporation.⁷⁶³ More specifically, in his view, the guiding presence of the logic of corporations gives crowds an "intelligent direction" while the chaotic agency of the crowd expands and fuels the productive effects of this corporate logic.⁷⁶⁴ Furthermore, following this reasoning, Tarde believes that, in order to better render the action of crowds "more controllable" and hence beneficial to civilization, a new type of leadership must be cultivated to guide it — one which privileges "intellectual or imaginative superiority" and its own individual qualities as well as that of their members.⁷⁶⁵ In this latter case, Tarde's view of the type of leadership that could guide a crowd and tap into the individuality of its members is very close to that often encouraged crowdsourcing discourse. However, Ernesto Laclau has traced how would the crowd theory of figures like Le Bon and Tarde along with Hippolyte Taine, Scipio Sighele, William McDougall, and Sigmund Freud would eventually move from this more dystopian vision of an unruly crowd to a new conception that avoids past binaries and accepts the

⁷⁶⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 42.

⁷⁶¹ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Trans. Carol Stewart, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1962), 15, 17-20, 29.

⁷⁶² Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 200.

⁷⁶³ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 42.

⁷⁶⁴ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 42.

⁷⁶⁵ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 43.

presence of rationality and heterogeneity within it, thus rendering it closer to Surowiecki's understanding of the wisdom of the diverse crowd or Howe's conception of the ideal crowd to be harnessed within the crowdsourcing process.⁷⁶⁶

Although crowdsourcing discourse is heavily influenced by this increasingly positive recognition of the individuality of the crowd's diverse members, the hierarchical relationship it tends to construct between professional project organizers and participants framed as amateurs is still significantly shaped by residual conceptions of the crowd as a chaotic and disorganized entity in need of control and proper leadership if it is to be successfully converted into a more productive force — longstanding understandings of the crowd influenced by the widely circulated theories and ideas about following the translated work of writers like Le Bon. Nevertheless, like Tarde's view of the chaotic crowd as being regulated by the logic of the corporation and potentially directed towards more beneficial ends through an ideal type of leadership, crowdsourcing discourse tends to frame the harnessed crowd of participants as carrying the potential for chaos and more productive activity if properly managed. Exemplifying the persistent influence of these past ideas within crowdsourcing discourse, this belief in the need for a professional leader to guide the chaotic amateur crowd into producing something of greater quality, coherence, and value — a narrative begun by Howe himself in his initial writing about crowdsourcing — re-surfaces within critical Western commentary about the crowdsourcing of media objects like Penguin Books' crowdsourced novel project *A Million Penguins* or novelist James Patterson's crowdsourced 'chain novel.'⁷⁶⁷ Similarly, in a 2013 BBC report following the completion of his crowdsourced film *Tricked* (2012), even Verhoeven would contradict his earlier claims of being guided by the crowd and reinforce the above belief by asserting that a crowdsourced film still needs “someone in charge, someone who really knows what they are doing in terms of telling a story” and that “Movies are still for the professionals.”⁷⁶⁸ Complemented by an implicit devaluation of the output of amateur participants akin to that detailed earlier, crowdsourcing discourse's tendency to represent the organizers behind crowdsourcing projects — related to the production of media or not — as essential professional

⁷⁶⁶Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 30, 33-35, 39-40, 57-58, 61-63.

⁷⁶⁷See “The Sound and the Wiki,” *PC Magazine*. 26.19. (Oct. 2, 2007): 19; Simon Creasy, “Power to the People.” *Bookseller*. 5377. (April 10th, 2009): 25-26, ProQuest.

⁷⁶⁸Emma Jones, “Tricked: Paul Verhoeven's crowdsourced script,” *BBC*, August 7th, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130807-the-public-cant-write>

managers serves to ideologically justify the unequal amount of power and control that they still hold over participants and over several key aspects of the crowdsourcing process. This aspect of crowdsourcing discourse thus contributes to the reproduction of a hierarchical power relation between the organizers and owners of crowdsourcing projects and the crowd of participants contributing to them — an unbalanced relationship that predominantly benefits the former two entities and the neoliberal capitalistic system that relies on this unequal distribution of control.

Crowd as Collaborative, Communal, and Cohesive Group

In order to mask these types of hierarchies that are often cultivated within crowdsourcing projects and the discourse about them, crowdsourcing, like the Web 2.0 paradigm itself, is frequently characterized within various sources of commentary since Howe's similar formulation as being collaborative in character and as entailing collaboration between the members of a connected crowd or between the organizers and participants of a crowdsourcing project. For instance, in a 2008 article for the *Harvard Business Review's* website, Gary P. Pisano and Roberto Verganti would situate crowdsourcing in relation to "open models of collaboration" with others.⁷⁶⁹ Similarly conceiving the practice in terms of collaboration would be writer Michelle Lindholm who, in a July 2011 article for the website *Mashable*, would define crowdsourcing as occurring when an organization "opens up the problem to a crowd of people for mass collaboration," misusing the term initially conceived by Tapscott and Williams with its stronger suggestion of self-organization.⁷⁷⁰ Likewise, in a 2012 report for *Adweek*, Joan Voight would detail how industry professionals often described the crowdsourcing of marketing-related media content from fans as involving a deeper "collaboration" with them.⁷⁷¹ Lastly, in a 2013 article for *Wired*, Alpheus Bingham would describe how crowdsourcing can function as a "platform" for "collaboration with diverse individuals and groups."⁷⁷² Due to the increasingly idealistic understanding of collaboration promulgated by Web 2.0 rhetoric in general with its suggestion of a more egalitarian, stronger, and communal relationship between various stakeholders and users, the pervasive representation of crowdsourcing as a practice involving collaboration among

⁷⁶⁹ Gary P. Pisano and Roberto Verganti, "Which Kind of Collaboration is Right for You?," *Harvard Business Review*, December 2008, <https://hbr.org/2008/12/which-kind-of-collaboration-is-right-for-you>

⁷⁷⁰ Michelle Lindblom, "Why Every College Should Start Crowdsourcing," *Mashable*, July 19th, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/07/19/crowdsourcing-college/#xSzXIdfXC8qw>

⁷⁷¹ Joan Voight, "No Liftoff (Yet) For Launchpad," *Adweek*, December 11th, 2012, <http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/no-liftoff-yet-launchpad-145798/>

⁷⁷² Alpheus Bingham, "Why Crowdsourcing is the Next Cloud Computing," *Wired*, October 2013, <https://www.wired.com/insights/2013/10/why-crowdsourcing-is-the-next-cloud-computing/>

participants and with project managers creates the often misleading impression that crowdsourcing and the projects which deploy it accord contributors a more substantive or equal amount of power and input within the production process. This collaborative vision of crowdsourcing, due to the participatory empowerment and more egalitarian relationship it suggests, also partly masks the unequal power relations that frequently emerge between the organizers and participants of crowdsourcing projects. Supported by its partial repression of this frequent power asymmetry between crowdsourcing contributors and managers, this affect-laden and attractive promise of a significant and seemingly empowering form of collaboration with organizers and other participants can often lure and compel online users into contributing their labour to specific crowdsourcing projects.

Complementing this repeated framing of crowdsourcing in terms of collaboration is the parallel tendency within Western commentary about the practice to associate it and the crowd it harnesses with an attractive notion of community that also promises potential participants an empowering sense of belonging to a cohesive group and of contributing to a purposeful social venture and egalitarian enterprise — an impression that also encourages and compels online users to participate within crowdsourcing projects, whether through belief in this promise of communal unity, an affective attachment to it, or both. This tendency to depict crowdsourcing as a communal and collaborative practice stands in stark contrast to scholars like Rouse, who recognize that crowdsourcing can either be individualistic and reward only a few participants or it can be more community-driven and beneficial to many participants.⁷⁷³ For instance, in a 2007 post on his website defending the practice against the criticism of coercive exploitation, Howe would assert that crowdsourcing "is enabled by communities, and communities are held together through shared passion."⁷⁷⁴ Elsewhere, within a wide range of Western newspapers and magazines like *The Globe and Mail* and *The Independent* — including some with a stronger business focus — crowdsourcing platforms like Innocentive, Threadless, and Cambrian House are also frequently represented as being composed and driven by creative communities.⁷⁷⁵ Other

⁷⁷³Rouse, "A Preliminary Taxonomy of Crowdsourcing," 5.

⁷⁷⁴Jeff Howe, "Critiquing Crowdsourcing," *Crowdsourcing*, October 30th, 2007, <http://www.crowdsourcing.com/cs/2007/10/>

⁷⁷⁵See "Crowdsourcing: Where you, too, can have your say," *The Globe and Mail*, December 17th, 2006, last modified on April 7th, 2009, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/technology/crowdsourcing-where-you-too-can-have-your-say/article22504853/>; Rick Spence, "The Wisdom of Crowdsourcing," *Profit*, February 11th, 2007, <http://www.profitguide.com/manage-grow/success-stories/cambrian-house-the-wisdom-of-crowdsourcing-29090>; Jeff Howe, "JOIN THE CROWD," *The Independent*, September 2nd, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/>

characterizations of crowdsourcing and its participants within Western magazines and websites focused on business, marketing, and new media technologies such as *PR Week* or *New Media Age*, however, often present the crowd that is harnessed as a specific online community or they situate it as part of a broader global community on the Web.⁷⁷⁶ This tendency to articulate crowdsourcing with notions of community also expands to a wide array of publications addressing media crowdsourcing projects ranging from media studies scholarship to the websites of magazines, various sources of commentary from their organizers, and the open calls of the projects themselves. Exemplifying this trend within digital media studies, Jenkins, Ford, and Green would depict the participants in media crowdsourcing projects as being part of a “community” of contributors.⁷⁷⁷ Moreover, during the production of the partially crowdsourced science fiction film *Iron Sky* (2012), the project's lead director and organizer Timo Vuorensola in a 2007 blog post would praise the power of the “Creative communalities” on display after modular tasks such as the design of a Nazi base on the moon were completed by the forum members of the production company Energia Productions' website.⁷⁷⁸ Echoing Vuorensola's communitarian framing, in a 2011 article for the UK-based online design magazine *Design Week*, Laura Snoad would report on the Tate Movie Project launched in 2010 and its crowdsourcing of pictures, ideas, and votes from thousands of 5-13 UK children for an animated film short produced by Aardman Animations studio — eventually titled *The Itch of the Golden Nit* (2011) — and openly represent it as “community-generated project.”⁷⁷⁹ Likewise, in 2012, the organizers behind the crowdsourced art film *Gesamt* would also describe it within their open call as a potential “community masterpiece.”⁷⁸⁰ Moreover, when discussing The Entertainment Experience project

life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/join-the-crowd-why-do-multinationals-use-amateurs-to-solve-scientific-and-technical-problems-915658.html; Tracey Caldwell, “R & D Finds Answers in the Crowd,” *Information World Review*, 236, June 4th, 2007, pg. 8; and Mitch Joel, “Let crowdsourcing do your R&D,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 20th, 2008, B7.

⁷⁷⁶For examples of this deployment of the term “community,” see the descriptions of crowdsourcing and its participants in the following articles, “Crowd Control: Crowdsourcing Puts Brands in Consumers' Hands,” *PR News* 65, no. 31, August 10th, 2009, <http://www.prnewsonline.com/featured/2009/08/31/crowd-control-crowdsourcing-puts-brands-in-consumers-hands/>; Adam Woods, “CROWDSOURCING: Sound of the crowd,” *New Media Age*, (August 12th, 2010): 18.; and John Miziolek, “Crowdsourcing: Creativity 2.0,” *Brandpackaging* 15, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2011): 16.

⁷⁷⁷Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 249.

⁷⁷⁸Timo Vuorensola, “United We Stand On The Moon!,” *Beyond the Iron Sky, Star Wreck Blog*, December 5th, 2007, <http://blog.starwreck.com/2007/12/05/united-we-stand-on-the-moon/>

⁷⁷⁹Laura Snoad, “Crowdsourcing for kids,” *Design Week*, June 30th, 2011, <http://www.designweek.co.uk/crowdsourcing-for-kids/>

⁷⁸⁰Nick Newman, “Lars von Trier Issues Challenge to Recreate Famous Art with 'Gesamt,’” *The Film Stage*, August 13th, 2012, <http://thefilmstage.com/news/lars-von-trier-issues-challenge-to-recreate-famous-art-with-gesamt/>

he organized with Verhoeven, CEO Justus Verkerk would idealistically claim in 2013 to have “involved a very large community” into “helping a major movie director to make the first user-generated film.”⁷⁸¹ Even Chris Jones, the director of the crowdsourced film *50 Kisses*, would boast of having “built a community” and a mutually beneficial communal platform for participating members during the film's production through which they could further their “writing,” their “list of credits,” and their “career.”⁷⁸² Similarly, in the video-based open call for director Kyle Ruddick's crowdsourced global documentary mosaic *One Day on Earth* — a project that, similar to YouTube's crowdsourced film *Life in a Day*, seeks to capture and document the diversity of experience in the world on a particular day in 2010 — potential participants are invited to “join our international community of thousands of filmmakers, hundreds of schools, and dozens of non-profits, and contribute to this unique global mosaic,” promising that, through “the One Day on Earth platform, we will establish a community that not only watches, but participates.”⁷⁸³ Although *One Day On Earth* also characterizes itself as existing to support the individuality of contributors and to “empower” their “voice” as “celebration of individual beliefs, expression and perspective” within its founding principles, these principles also repeat this desire to cultivate a connected “community that fosters communication” and can “create and support future collaborations amongst participants.”⁷⁸⁴ Akin to the Web 2.0 rhetoric of which it is a part, this discursive association of crowdsourcing and projects that depend on it with notions of community often beneficially masks the power relations and commercial motivations frequently attached to the practice or present within such projects through the suggestion of a more collaborative and less exploitative relationship between their organizers and participants as well as between the contributors themselves. Moreover, if deployed at the beginning or during the production process of projects like *Iron Sky*, *Gesamt*, *50 Kisses*, *One Day on Earth*, especially within their open call, this communitarian rhetoric can encourage and compel online users to contribute to these media crowdsourcing experiments through its implicit promise of an affectively satisfying and empowering sense of

⁷⁸¹Joanna Kirk, “Interview: Justus Verkerk: How Paul Verhoeven's User-Generated Film Film Went Stellar,” *Mip Blog*, June 26th, 2013, <http://blog.mipworld.com/2013/06/interview-justus-verkerk-how-tricked-paul-verhoevens-user-generated-film-went-stellar/#.VO6EIUI4IZY>

⁷⁸²Chris Jones, “Getting to the 50,” *50 Kisses Film*, August 3rd, 2012, <http://www.50kissesfilm.com/2012/08/03/getting-to-the-50/>

⁷⁸³“One Day on Earth Participant Trailer,” Vimeo Video, 2:12, posted by “One Day on Earth,” April 25th, 2010, <http://vimeo.com/11214910>

⁷⁸⁴“Founding Principles,” *One Day on Earth.org*, accessed January 17th, 2015. <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>

belonging, membership, and participation within a community with a shared purpose wherein collaborating contributors all benefit equally with project organizers and each other. In a 2008 article, writer Courtney Brooks would recognize this very promise and reproduce it by claiming that crowdsourcing allows participants to be part of a connected community and avoid the isolation often experienced within online user interactions.⁷⁸⁵ However, this distorted communitarian vision of participation within a crowdsourcing project accords a misleading degree of power and coherence to what is often a loose grouping of isolated participants with very different subjective motivations. Ultimately, in the context of media production, this framing of crowdsourcing as a community-driven process or a means to cultivate community is another affective-discursive strategy within the over-arching apparatus of control emerging alongside our twenty first century media ecosystem of user-generated media content. More specifically, it is another strategy that supports the neoliberal paradigm of communicative capitalism driving this new environment through its masking of the hierarchical relations of power and exploitation often involved between participants and organizers within media crowdsourcing projects. It also supports this paradigm through its complementary function as a means to emotionally and ideologically compel online users to assume a desired neoliberal form of creative subjectivity and to voluntarily contribute their cultural labour within media crowdsourcing projects. As seen in the case of the *One Day on Earth* project and its founding principles, the Web 2.0 rhetoric about community and collaboration that frequently surrounds crowdsourcing projects, whether related to media production or not, often explicitly complements and co-exists with a more individualistic narrative of empowerment that promises and encourages the neoliberal form of creative subjectivity desired by this twenty first century mode of communicative capitalism.

Crowdsourcing's Promise of Global Connectivity, Inclusivity, and Diversity

Complementing this framing of crowdsourcing as a collaborative and community-driven practice that can empower average citizens is the parallel tendency of Western commentary on the topic to draw on the Surowiecki-influenced work of Howe and similarly represent it idealistically as being an inclusive and global process that is driven by a truly diverse crowd of participants or one which needs the crowd harnessed to have such a heterogeneous composition. In particular, Western commentary about crowdsourcing within business and management-

⁷⁸⁵Courtney Brooks, "Network to get work done free," *Cape Times*, June 3rd, 2008. 3.

oriented scholarship and journalism would perpetuate this image of global connectivity, diversity, and inclusivity attached to crowdsourcing and, in the process, significantly mask the differing degrees of access and control with regard to cultural production, which are afforded to different demographics, groups, and classes of people in the world. For instance, in a 2010 paper on how to successfully harness the crowd's collective intelligence via crowdsourcing, scholar Ankit Sharma ascribes to the practice the “ability to transcend geographic, political, economic barriers by means of virtual integration.”⁷⁸⁶ Likewise, in a 2012 article within the *California Management Review Journal*, Daniel Stieger and his co-authors emphasize how crowdsourcing, due to the online tools that enable it, can create “an environment where time and place no longer matter,” claiming that “Wherever and whenever employees want to contribute their ideas, they can do so, no matter how geographically dispersed they are.”⁷⁸⁷ Similarly, in his 2013 article for the *Wall Street Journal* article, even Wadhwa would represent crowdsourcing as democratizing practice that eliminates former geographical boundaries, thus “enabling anyone to take a job anywhere.”⁷⁸⁸ All of these examples paint crowdsourcing as a truly inclusive and global practice that can transcend national boundaries and foster a significant degree of global connectivity among its participants and with businesses and organizers who adopt the Web 2.0 practice.

Moreover, published statements about the practice of media crowdsourcing also frequently make reference to the global, diverse, and inclusive character of a contributing crowd or crowdsourcing project — assertions that have the effect of framing the crowdsourcing process itself as affording a form of global inclusivity, connection, and collaboration. For instance, in relation to the crowdsourced *One Day on Earth* documentary project, “inclusivity” is explicitly listed as one of its founding principles and the project is said to be “free and open to all people, cultures, beliefs, and nationalities.”⁷⁸⁹ Similarly, New York-based artist Perry Bard's crowdsourced film remake of Dziga Vertov's original film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), entitled *Man with a Movie Camera: A Global Remake* (2007-present) would also highlight the

⁷⁸⁶Ankit Sharma, “Crowdsourcing critical success factor model: Strategies to harness the collective intelligence of the crowd,” (Working Paper 1, London School of Economics, London, 2010), 16, <http://irevolution.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/working-paper1.pdf>.

⁷⁸⁷Daniel Stieger, Kurt Matzler, Sayan Chatterjee, and Florian Ladstaetter-Fussenegger, “Democratizing Strategy: How Crowdsourcing Can Be Used For Strategy Dialogues,” *California Management Review* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 47.

⁷⁸⁸Vivek Wadhwa, “Weekend Read: Crowdsourcing is Overtaking Outsourcing,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 20th, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/accelerators/2013/12/20/weekend-read-crowdsourcing-is-overtaking-outsourcing/>

⁷⁸⁹“Founding Principles,” *One Day on Earth.org*, accessed January 17th, 2015. <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>

supposedly global character of the crowdsourcing process adopted to create the film within its very title. Likewise, in a 2012 article for the technology website *VentureBeat*, writer Dean Takahashi claims that, with projects like Tiffany Schlain's film *A Declaration of Interdependence* (2011), “crowdsourcing techniques” are adopted to create “films that are so global in scope that they wouldn’t otherwise be possible.”⁷⁹⁰ Even *Gesamt* in 2012 was explicitly characterized by its organizers as an “open invitation to people around the globe” to create a “*universal work of art*” and, with the help of “*a diversity and multitude of people,*” represent “*the human condition's greater purpose than power and profit.*”⁷⁹¹ In the same year, even director Chris Jones would initially characterize his film crowdsourcing project *50 Kisses* as being “made by the crowd, from around the world, with all that unique diversity.”⁷⁹² Lastly, the organizing creators who initiated *Scarface Redux*, a 2014 project “to remake Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (1983)” and construct a “new, crowd-sourced” version with the help of the online crowd, would also describe the work as a “global, collaborative effort.”⁷⁹³ Complementing the utopian claims embedded within concepts like Surowiecki's wisdom of the crowd that have become strongly connected to the Web 2.0 paradigm along with the narrative of participatory democratization and empowerment tied to Web 2.0 trends including crowdsourcing itself, this constant emphasis on the global collaboration, inclusivity, and diversity afforded by crowdsourcing projects again reveals crowdsourcing discourse's important existence as a complementary incarnation of the less explicitly individualistic dimension of Web 2.0 rhetoric — one that focuses on the heightened degree of network-based user collaboration afforded to connected citizens in the twenty first century. In addition, it reflects what Dean views as communicative capitalism's totalizing utopian fantasy of global unity.⁷⁹⁴ As will be illustrated in the next chapter, this very fantasy re-appears within the surrounding commentary and statements about the documentary crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day*, which embodies the 'global documentary mosaic' genre of crowdsourced filmmaking. As with the previously discussed discourse about community and

⁷⁹⁰Dean Takahashi, “Crowdsourcing is Creating the Cloud Filmmaking Revolution,” *VentureBeat*, November 7th, 2012. 2012, <http://venturebeat.com/2012/11/07/crowdsourcing-is-creating-the-cloud-filmmaking-revolution/>

⁷⁹¹Nick Newman, “Lars von Trier Issues Challenger to Recreate Famous Art with 'Gesamt.'” *The Film Stage*, August 13th, 2012, <http://thefilmstage.com/news/lars-von-trier-issues-challenge-to-recreate-famous-art-with-gesamt/>

⁷⁹²Chris Jones, “Do you want your film in cinemas in February next year? Read on... '50 Kisses.’” *Chris Jones Blog*. July 6th, 2012. <http://www.chrisjonesblog.com/2012/07/do-you-want-your-film-in-cinemas-in-february-next-year-50-kisses.html>

⁷⁹³“About,” *Scarface Redux*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.scarfaceredux.com/about/>

⁷⁹⁴Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, 44.

collaboration surrounding the practice, this fantastical vision of crowdsourcing's capacity to afford a form of global unity and diversity within its crowd of participants similarly masks hierarchical power relations or, more specifically, those that exist between citizens from different countries, thus bolstering the attractive and affectively charged promise of democratization, belonging, and connection articulated with the practice. This promise then entices potential participants into voluntarily contributing media content to the new neoliberal paradigm of communicative capitalism embodied by platforms, practices, and enterprises driven by user-generated content including media crowdsourcing projects.

Ultimately, once the core assertions and associations attached to crowdsourcing that have been detailed within this chapter are combined, discourse about the Web 2.0 practice tends to construct an idealistic vision of a connected and global community of amateur participants newly empowered and included through the novel and transformative democratization of participation and collaboration afforded by crowdsourcing's networked processes. Despite this utopian characterization of crowdsourcing as entailing a transformative form of participatory empowerment for average citizens, many literary texts and sources of commentary addressing the practice cultivate an amateur-professional dichotomy among the participants and organizers of crowdsourcing projects and then paradoxically stress the need for a hierarchical forms of leadership wherein the professional initiators of a crowdsourcing process flexibly guide, manage, and direct the supposedly chaotic productivity of amateur participants and collaborators. Taken together, this often idealistic and highly promising vision of crowdsourcing's potential is part of an emerging apparatus of discursive and non-discursive strategies — an apparatus that supports the contemporary neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism driving our twenty first century online media ecosystem. Specifically, it fulfills this supportive function by seeking to affectively and ideologically encourage and stimulate the autonomous production and contribution of media content and creative ideas by online users that sustain this new capitalistic paradigm while softly controlling this creative activity and channeling its resulting products. It also contributes to this role by masking and legitimizing the unequal power relations and exploitation that are necessary to fully harness the relatively autonomous productivity of connected users and to extract its value in a manner that primarily benefits the capitalistic interests now inhabiting this emerging online media ecosystem. As will be demonstrated more concretely through this third and final section's case study analyses, this idealistic discourse about crowdsourcing and its various claims is often

strategically deployed within the open call of media crowdsourcing projects and the commentary about them by their organizers in tandem with the other flexible control strategies of this larger apparatus supporting communicative capitalism. Through its strategic adoption within media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* or *Star Wars Uncut*, this crowdsourcing discourse will be shown to be a means of influencing online users into participating in productive activity by making them believe in the attractive promise of empowerment that this discourse often contains as well as be affectively stimulated by it. The following two chapters and their case study analyses will also demonstrate how this discourse, if successful, can affectively and ideologically compel these users into internalizing the productive form of creative subjectivity required by these projects and the wider logic of communicative capitalism in order to attract their participation within media crowdsourcing projects and channel its resulting value. Lastly, they will uncover the hierarchies and unequal power relations that are often present within such projects, but which are actively hidden by the above discourse's often utopian association of crowdsourcing with a transformative form of citizen empowerment — an effect that is deemed to result from the increased amount of creative participation and collaboration afforded to online users by the crowdsourcing process itself.

Critical Crowdsourcing Discourse: A Counterpoint

Even though a lot of discourse about the Web 2.0 practice of crowdsourcing perpetuates this idealistic narrative of online user participation and collaboration, more critical perspectives on the subject and its surrounding rhetoric do exist and similarly uncover some of the economic realities and power relations that are often masked by this discourse. Cutting across a variety of socio-cultural and economic fields, this emerging counter-discourse will shape and inform the next chapters' critical examination of media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut*, which will further prove the legitimacy of many of the critiques expressed by the commentators and scholars contributing to it. One of the prominent areas in which this critical outlook emerges is, once again, within Western publications focused on business management and marketing wherein this perspective often goes farther than highlighting the flawed usages of crowdsourcing or its potential threat to professional industries; instead, it increasingly acknowledges the tensions that can or do exist between the participants and the organizers of crowdsourcing projects along with the latter's frequently profit-oriented motivations. Exemplifying this more critical stance within crowdsourcing discourse, Christine Clark, in a

2010 article for the former international advertising magazine *Boards*, skeptically wonders how much of the utopian narrative surrounding crowdsourcing is masking its “attractiveness as simply a cost-effective gambit?”⁷⁹⁵ Supporting this growing understanding of crowdsourcing's use as a cost-saving measure intended to maximize profit, even Tapscott and Williams in a later publication than *Wikinomics* began to critically position the use of crowdsourcing to simply obtain cheap labour against examples of their original concept of mass collaboration, which instead “carve out meaningful roles for contributors and allow community members to share in the ownership and fruits of their creations.”⁷⁹⁶ Sensing the tensions that could potentially result from the single-minded appropriation of crowdsourcing to reduce production costs, writer Eleftheria Parpis, in a 2009 article for the advertising magazine *Ad Week*, believes it to be inevitable that the participants and the organizers of marketing-based crowdsourcing projects will enter a conflict with each other on the subject of financial compensation.⁷⁹⁷ Foregrounding this reality within a 2010 article for the online magazine *Design Week*, Jim Davies notes how the so-called 'losers' of crowdsourcing competitions involving design tasks for brands often feel exploited when they are not adequately compensated for their labour.⁷⁹⁸ Likewise, in the same publication later that year, Christian Barnett would critically acknowledge the asymmetrical power relations that can form between participants and the organizers of a crowdsourcing project when the former are prevented from knowing the latter's true intentions and goals.⁷⁹⁹

Outside of such business and marketing literature, Western commentary about crowdsourcing's use within the realm of art and media would also display a similarly critical stance towards the practice's capitalistic connections as well as its unequal distribution of value amidst all of its stakeholders. For instance, in a 2012 article within *Artforum International*, writer Jakob Schillinger resists the tendency to view "participatory models of cultural production" like crowdsourcing as being transformatively empowering for participants. In contrast to this dominant perception, he argues that the “political meaning” of the forms of production cannot “be separated from their larger context and the economic function they fulfill within it” and that, as part of a "proprietary system," they are designed to create a newer and cheaper labour force

⁷⁹⁵Christine Clark, “So Saith the Crowd,” *Boards* (Jan. 2010): 14, ProQuest.

⁷⁹⁶Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Macrowikinomics: Rebooting Business and the World* (Toronto, Ontario: Penguin Group, 2010), 63.

⁷⁹⁷ Eleftheria Parpis, “Crowd Control,” *Ad Week* 50, no. 39 (Nov. 2nd, 2009): 21, ProQuest.

⁷⁹⁸Jim Davies, “A Democratic Gesture?”, *Design Week* 25, no. 7 (February 18th, 2010): 10.

⁷⁹⁹Christian Barnett, “It's new, it's exciting, but it's not clever,” *Design Week*, 25, no. 47 (Nov. 25th, 2010): 18.

whose value is to be extracted for the primary benefit of the capitalistic culture industry.⁸⁰⁰ Sometimes, this emerging critical commentary on crowdsourcing's exploitative character is even embedded within artworks that subversively adopt the practice, thus initially existing outside the growing critical discursive statements about the practice while also simultaneously informing and supporting it. For instance, American artist Aaron Koblin created crowdsourced media like *Sheep Market* (2006) and *Ten Thousands Cents* (2008) in order to self-reflexively criticize and encourage discussion about the relations of exploitation that he perceived within Amazon's crowdsourcing platform Mechanical Turk launched in 2005. *The Sheep Market* consisted of an open call asking Mechanical Turk workers to each “draw a sheep facing to the left” for a mere 0.02 U.S dollars after which the drawings were aggregated into a collection of 10, 000 sheep on the website TheSheepMarket.com.⁸⁰¹ With collaborator Takashi Kawashima, Koblin's *Ten Thousand Cents* also entailed Mechanical Turkers being asked to draw a fragment of a 100 U.S. dollar bill “without knowledge of the overall task,” which is the creation of a complete image of the bill that would often be presented “as a video piece with all 10,000 parts being drawn simultaneously” while each being paid one cent each for a total cost of 100 dollars.⁸⁰² Both works use crowdsourcing to comment on the minimal compensation often granted to the crowd within ostensibly collaborative projects. Ironically, as indicated by scholar Iona Literat, these types of artistic projects can entail their own forms of exploitation and inequality and, in the case of *The Sheep Market*, contributors became “outraged” when they realized that they had no legal ownership over their drawings and that their “10,000 generated sheep” were being sold for \$20 each.⁸⁰³ Acknowledging this outcry, Koblin himself would publically disseminate his Master's thesis critically assessing the Mechanical Turk website via *The Sheep Market* project and view the critical conversations sparked among the site's workers about the implications of its

⁸⁰⁰Jakob Schillinger, “User-Friendly,” *Artforum International* 51, no. 3 (Nov 2012): 128.

⁸⁰¹“The Sheep Market,” *AaronKoblin.com*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/thesheepmarket/index.html>; “The Sheep Market,” *TheSheepMarket.com*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.thesheepmarket.com>

⁸⁰²“Ten Thousands Cents,” *TenThousandCents.com*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.tenthousandcents.com/top.html>

⁸⁰³Iona Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation: Crowdsourced Art and Collective Creativity,” *International Journal of Communication*, 6 (2012): pg. 2978, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1531/835>.

crowdsourcing system as a positive outcome.⁸⁰⁴

Although present within business and marketing literature along with various forms of publications and digital media addressing the use of crowdsourcing to produce creative works with the help of a participatory crowd, this critical stance towards the Web 2.0 practice is particularly prominent within scholarly texts analyzing the socio-economic, cultural, and political effects of new media technologies on the realm of production, creative or otherwise. In fact, scholarly analyses of crowdsourcing as a phenomenon following its introduction as a concept in 2006 have also similarly foregrounded its connection to capitalistic systems and distinguished it from more truly collaborative forms of online participation wherein control, input, and benefits are more widely shared among the stakeholders. As a result, they avoid the utopian vision of individual and collective empowerment via a democratized form of creative participation, heightened inclusion, and communal collaboration — a representation that, as has already been detailed in this chapter, is frequently articulated with crowdsourcing within a wide range of Western publications. For instance, while elsewhere relating the practice to Tapscott and Williams's egalitarian and decentralized vision of mass collaboration,⁸⁰⁵ Rheingold ultimately distinguishes crowdsourcing from this concept — which, in his view, involves "playbor organized by and for the playborers' benefit" — by highlighting how it is "often centrally controlled, or controlled in a hub-and-spoke manner" and, as a result, "many contributions from widespread contributors are centrally collected and aggregated" for the benefit of the controlling actor.⁸⁰⁶ Making an entirely different, but similar qualification, Bruns perceives crowdsourcing as a response to the dwindling power of established media powers in the face of what he calls collaborative produsage and, thus, as a means for corporations to appropriate produsage communities for short-term profit.⁸⁰⁷ Elsewhere, other critical scholars like Trebor Scholz, Ayhan Aytes, and Florian Alexander Schmidt have also begun to problematize the utopian rhetoric of democratized participation and empowerment often associated with crowdsourcing and address the unequal power relations that can often stem from it.⁸⁰⁸ Further exemplifying this critical trend

⁸⁰⁴ Aaron Koblin, "The Sheep Market: Two cents' worth." Master's thesis. Design and Media Arts Program, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006. Retrieved from www.aaronkoblin.com/work/theshsheepmarket/TheSheepMarket.doc, 29-30.

⁸⁰⁵Rheingold, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*, 168.

⁸⁰⁶Rheingold, *Net Smart: Hot to Thrive Online*, 173.

⁸⁰⁷Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, 31, 33.

⁸⁰⁸For examples of this criticism of crowdsourcing and online collaboration, see Trebor Scholz, "Cheaper by the Dozen: An Introduction to 'Crowdsourcing,'" in *Net Works: Case Studies in Web Art and Design*, ed. Xtine Burroughs

within their 2008 article for *Science, Technology & Innovation Studies*, the arguments expressed by Kleemann and his co-authors also undermine more idealistic conceptions of crowdsourcing, especially the belief that it is an inherently beneficial practice for participants. Specifically, they resist this belief by arguing that it excludes the “problematic possibility that firms may be able to manipulate individuals' cost-benefit calculations” and by drawing attention to the way in which business consultants “openly discuss crowdsourcing as a model in which participating consumers get absolutely no benefit from their participation.”⁸⁰⁹ Furthermore, they posit that the “essence of crowdsourcing” is “the intentional mobilization for commercial exploitation of creative ideas and other forms of work performed by consumers.”⁸¹⁰ Following in these footsteps, in their book *Evil Media* (2012), Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffrey describe crowdsourcing as an unethical and exploitative means that is part of an increasingly flexible capitalistic mode of social organization. Paralleling the neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism described throughout this dissertation, this new capitalistic paradigm, in their view, seeks to: cheaply harness and extract the collective intelligence found on digital networks; further commodify culture for particular interests through its use of strategies to encourage and shape participation rather than restrict it; and create an asymmetrical power relationship between project organizers and participants wherein organizers control the conditions for participation and the content of the directives and benefit the most from the resulting products.⁸¹¹ Echoing this view of crowdsourcing as a capitalistic practice, John Caldwell has asserted that the seemingly “benign and utopian” connotations, which the term crowdsourcing has come to acquire, displace “the far darker term, outsourcing” and that crowdsourcing is possibly the greatest incarnation of outsourcing and the exploitation it tends to embody since the participating crowd of users usually works for free, receives no employee rights or benefits, and is disorganized and unable to demand the protection of labor laws.⁸¹² Furthermore, in his increasingly more critical work on the subject, Brabham has

(New York: Routledge, 2012), 47-54; Ayhan Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 79-97; Florian Alexander Schmidt, “The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly: Why Crowdsourcing Needs Ethics,” *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on October 8th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014.

<http://florianschmidt.co/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

⁸⁰⁹Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators,” 10.

⁸¹⁰Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators,” 22-23.

⁸¹¹Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffrey, *Evil Media*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012), 50-52.

⁸¹²John Caldwell, “Worker Blowback: User-Generated, Worker-Generated, and Producer-Generated Content within Collapsing Production Workflows,” in *Television as Digital Media*, eds. James Bennett and Niki Strange (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 285-286.

also foregrounded how the “inventive young minds” and “large corporations” who created “crowdsourcing applications in the first place” were the actors who stood the most to gain from them.⁸¹³ Moreover, he underlines how the voluntary participation of users and the relative degree of creative autonomy afforded to them often still uphold capitalistic systems as well as how these users rarely control and own the product that they create or the means by which it is shaped and distributed, nor do they democratically create it with the organizers of crowdsourcing projects.⁸¹⁴ The majority of these scholarly interventions actively interrogate the more idealistic discourse about crowdsourcing previously described in this chapter and recognize the relations of power and exploitation that this practice tends to cultivate between the participants and organizers of crowdsourcing projects due to its frequently capitalistic drive to acquire a cheap form of networked labour or intelligence and to profitably extract value from the creative and cultural productivity of a wider range of citizens within global society.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing on this contemporaneous critical discourse about crowdsourcing and then applying this critical approach to analyze representative examples of crowdsourced media production, the following two chapters' detailed examination of YouTube's crowdsourced 'global documentary mosaic' *Life in a Day* and the crowdsourced remake project *Star Wars Uncut* by creator Casey Pugh, respectively, will support the critical conception of the practice and of the frequently utopian discourse surrounding it, which has been articulated within the body of literature described in the prior paragraph. To bolster its critical arguments against crowdsourcing, the two last chapters of this final section will uncover the power relations, inequality, and exploitation found within the *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut* projects. Moreover, they will also specifically illustrate how these projects' open call and the strategies they choose to structure the conditions of participation and collaboration and filter the results encourage, limit, and shape the voluntarily given participatory agency of online users in a manner that, as Brabham suggests above, primarily satisfies the existing capitalistic interests of media corporations like Google and LucasFilm. Furthermore, the critical analysis within these chapters will demonstrate how these projects' specific choices, including their deployment of crowdsourcing discourse's more utopian claims, function to flexibly harness this user agency

⁸¹³Brabham, “Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases,” 85.

⁸¹⁴Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 90-91.

while cultivating hierarchies and unequal exchanges of value between participants and the project organizers and corporations to which their media content is donated.

Chapter Five: Critical Analysis of YouTube's *Life in a Day* and the Global Documentary Mosaic Genre of Media Crowdsourcing

Despite the tendency of evangelists, commentators, and scholars to frame the contributing users within crowdsourcing projects as being radically empowered through the democratization of participation and collaboration they supposedly enable — which has been detailed in the previous chapter's description and analysis of crowdsourcing discourse's core claims and features and their ideological function — the emerging critical counterpart to this more utopian discourse within popular commentary and scholarship has undercut some of the more idealistic assertions made about crowdsourcing by foregrounding the power asymmetry, inequality, and capitalistic exploitation that persist within these seemingly collaborative and participatory enterprises. In this chapter, this increasingly critical interrogation of participatory and collaborative Web 2.0 phenomena, which disconnects the former from the more idealistic characterizations of its proponents, will be shown to extend into emerging scholarship on media crowdsourcing projects. Concretely, this emerging critical body of scholarly literature also foregrounds the contingent character of the user participation and collaboration found within these projects and the power relations that are often involved. Moreover, this chapter will support many of this literature's critical interventions and core claims by examining how early experiments using crowdsourcing to produce original media content, while requiring the creative agency of online users and promising more substantial forms of participatory and collaborative empowerment for them, often failed to compel enough users to contribute their productivity and still frequently accorded the vast amount of control over their final form to their organizers. However, the central case study, which will be analyzed in-depth within this chapter and build on this corpus of critical texts about artistic and media-related forms of crowdsourcing, will be YouTube's *Life in a Day* project (2011) — an example of a dominant genre of media crowdsourcing that actively perpetuates the fantasy of global unity and inclusion tied to the Web 2.0 paradigm and crowdsourcing itself, a genre that I will term the "global documentary mosaic." Through this case study, this chapter will examine how the open call of *Life in a Day* along with its surrounding paratextual content and commentary specifically characterizes participation in the project and ends up combining a neoliberal appeal to the individual participant through the offering of rewards and promises of personal recognition, professionalization, and empowerment with seemingly incompatible notions of community, belonging, and shared social value.

Furthermore, it will investigate how the strategies adopted within media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* shape the form and degree of participation and authorship that their users can possess over the final product and the type of collaboration in which they are engaging. These strategies will be demonstrated to be part of the same apparatus of flexible control and neoliberal system of communicative capitalism detailed within the preceding section on YouTube-based user-generated content — a capitalistic paradigm that is increasingly driven by the channeling and control of the participatory agency and productivity of networked users occurring within online media platforms. This chapter will also highlight how, through its profit-driven implementation, this flexible apparatus of communicative control frequently cultivates and results in relations of power, inequality, and exclusion between the participating crowd and the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day*. Through the analysis of this power asymmetry within the *Life in a Day*, media crowdsourcing projects — while encouraging the creative agency of the crowd's members and embodying the same inclusive, flexible, and neoliberal paradigm of capitalistic control seen within social media platforms — will be shown to share certain features with past hierarchical modes of media production and consumer management due to the significant amount of centralized control possessed by their organizers. Moreover, deviating from the tendency within crowdsourcing commentary to solely focus on the constitution of the crowd, this case study will analyze the composition of the organizers who wield the most control over these media crowdsourcing projects and their participants. Ultimately, this chapter will foreground the ways in which media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* frequently fail to live up to their idealistic promises of radical empowerment, inclusion, and shared benefit for users within the realm of media and cultural production — substantial rewards which online users are said to acquire through the heightened participation and collaboration afforded by these projects and which are explicitly or implicitly promised within the latter's open call and the generally utopian discourse about Web 2.0 practices like crowdsourcing that surrounds such enterprises.

While briefly addressed at the tail end of the preceding chapter, a growing corpus of scholarly texts that critically engage with various forms of crowdsourcing including its use to create media productions — a trend which has become more dominant in recent years and is part of the larger critical interrogation of utopian conceptions of online user participation and collaboration within digital media studies — has similarly begun to resist the tendency to frame

the participation and collaboration afforded within media crowdsourcing projects in reductively positive and idealistic terms and as inherently empowering processes for participants. For instance, while Jenkins, Ford, and Green criticize the concepts of crowdsourcing and the crowd for minimizing the varied contributions of the “community of participants” that they deem to be involved in a “collaboration between audiences and producers,” their implicit framing of the relationship between media crowdsourcing project organizers and contributors as a “collaboration” lacks the utopian and egalitarian connotations usually associated with the term.⁸¹⁵ Moreover, following from this more pragmatic perspective on media-related crowdsourcing, Jenkins and his co-authors even conclude that crowd-driven projects “‘may ascribe more or less power to co-creators or to the artist 'curating' the co-creators' contributions,” accord “‘more or less intelligence and creativity to the crowd,” and be “‘more or less democratic in their logic.”⁸¹⁶ In addition, other scholars critically engaging with networked forms of collaborative media production — such as Jon Dovey, Sandra Gaudenzi, Iona Literat, and Antoni Roig Telo — have also started to recognize their contingent character and examine the different forms, levels, and degrees of participation, collaboration, and control afforded by the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects to the contributing members of the online crowd they harness and, occasionally, to situate the latter within pre-existing capitalistic systems and the power relations they tend to cultivate. For example, for his part, Dovey underlines the extraction and exploitation of value by corporate interests often present within documentary productions that rely on crowdsourcing like *Life in a Day*.⁸¹⁷ With co-author Mandy Rose, he has even emphasized how the discursive framing and other 'frames' within a documentary project's open call and beyond it shape the limits of participation, thus acknowledging the latter's contingent character and the restrictions that are often attached to any form of participation.⁸¹⁸ Likewise, in her work, Gaudenzi foregrounds the varying strategies of collaboration or participation adopted by the organizers of crowdsourced documentaries and how they frame “the level of intervention that the prosumer can have on the final product, that is, what can and cannot be done.”⁸¹⁹ Consequently,

⁸¹⁵Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, 249.

⁸¹⁶Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, 248.

⁸¹⁷Jon Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, eds. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17- 21, 24.

⁸¹⁸Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” 22-24.

⁸¹⁹Sandra Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices, and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and

she argues that, during their analysis of such film projects and their strategies, scholars must pay attention to questions like: “who is invited to participate,” “what can the participant do,” and “when is the collaboration happening?”⁸²⁰ Asking similar questions about what “what constitutes meaningful artistic participation?” within crowdsourced art,⁸²¹ Literat has similarly contributed to this growing reconceptualization of idealized concepts like collaboration and participation. She has even criticized reductive references to the latter concept and the commonly held view of participation as a general “panacea” for failing to “account for the complexities of creative agency, artistic hierarchies, access, and capital.”⁸²² In order to account for this complexity, she, like Gaudenzi, acknowledges the different levels of participation that can exist within crowdsourced art projects including the generative form of what she terms ‘executory participation,’ which entails the completion of predesigned tasks and can be tokenistic, engaged, or creative.⁸²³ However, she importantly contrasts this executory mode of participation with a structural incarnation, which allows participants to have the “structural agency” to be co-authors and to have “a say in the conceptual and artistic design of the project.”⁸²⁴ She asserts that the differences between executory and structural modes of participation within artistic crowdsourcing projects reflect a “important distinction between participation and collaboration,” specifically the limited amount of — or, occasionally, the lack of — agency, influence, and choices that “participants—unlike collaborators—have over the structural design of the artwork and the claim of authorial rights.”⁸²⁵ From this perspective, Literat even recognizes that participation within projects like *Life in a Day* is rarely structural or democratic and that, often, constraints like low bandwidth or lack of internet access obstruct the ideal of global participation perpetuated by crowdsourcing discourse.⁸²⁶ However, as will be argued within this dissertation's two chapters analyzing various different incarnations of media crowdsourcing like the global documentary mosaic genre, creative agency and constraint, while they vary from project to project, are always present both within crowdsourced projects primarily driven by the execution of pre-designed tasks by “participants” as well as within other incarnations that accord user

Catherine Summerhayes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 130.

⁸²⁰Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” 144.

⁸²¹Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2974.

⁸²²Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2976.

⁸²³Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2976-78.

⁸²⁴Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2978.

⁸²⁵Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2978-9.

⁸²⁶Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2980.

contributors a more collaborative degree of input when it comes to their final form. As for Roig Telo, he has foregrounded how the “constitutive rules” of participatory creation are shaped by a wide variety of “social, cultural, and economic connections” and highlighted how this frequently crowd-driven mode of production also exists on “a spectrum from minimization to maximization of participation.”⁸²⁷ Consequently, like Literat, he recognizes that online participation within film crowdsourcing projects can often be limited and does not usually allow contributors to have a significant amount of power and input over the product's final form.⁸²⁸ For this reason, he argues that it is necessary for scholars analyzing such projects to look at the organizing practices that shape their “participatory condition” in order to determine the degree of participation they actually afford to contributors.⁸²⁹ Building on this growing re-conceptualization of what participation and collaboration mean within media crowdsourcing projects by the above authors and the other scholars described in the introduction like Carpentier, Condry, and Johnson, this chapter's later analysis of *Life in a Day* will represent participants within media crowdsourcing projects as having varying degrees of agency and always existing within relations of power and constraint regardless of the depth or form of participation and collaboration afforded to them. Thus, its critical examination of the YouTube project will recognize the collaborative and participatory dimension of relationships between organizers and participants, but it will stress their very limited character due to the exclusive authorial power that the former hold over its final form.

Participatory Failures and Limitations of Early Media Crowdsourcing Projects

However, before addressing the more mature and successful format of media crowdsourcing represented by the 'global documentary mosaic' genre and the *Life in a Day* project in particular, it is necessary to highlight how, because the apparatus of flexible control they embody inherently requires participating subjects whose creative autonomy is encouraged and enable, the successful deployment of media crowdsourcing itself and its flexible management of user creativity depends on this very autonomy, which can never be fully captured or controlled. For this very reason, media crowdsourcing projects are often marked by the possibility of failure if not enough creative and networked users choose to participate within

⁸²⁷ Roig Telo, Antoni, “Participatory Film Production as Media Practice,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 2315, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1593>.

⁸²⁸Roig Telo, “Participatory Film Production as Media Practice,” 2315, 2329.

⁸²⁹Roig Telo, “Participatory Film Production as Media Practice,” 2328.

them or if they actively resist the open call and a project. In addition, due to the more flexible management approach embodied by crowdsourcing and the Web 2.0-based platforms they often rely on, the excessive amount and unpredictable types of participatory creativity resulting from the open call of a specific media crowdsourcing project can often be difficult to control, shape, and organize into a desired form during the post-production phase. Occasionally, its organizers are not able to devote the significant amount of time and financial resources necessary over a sustained period to complete this final organizational task and the project itself. In fact, many early projects attempting to use the crowdsourcing process to produce an original media production would fail due to a lack of participation from users or because they were eventually abandoned by the creators who initiated and sought to manage them presumably due to their difficulty, a lack of required resources, or the growing disinterest of these initiating organizers. In this sense, the sustained creative agency of both the participating users and the project organizers are required for the successful completion of media crowdsourcing projects despite the idealistic rhetoric that often surrounds them.

For instance, in his 2008 book on crowdsourcing, Jeff Howe would idealistically champion Matt Hanson's failed film project *A Swarm of Angels* (2006) for its supposed use of the crowdsourcing process. Within this project, the “first thousand investors” or 'angels' choosing to participate within it and partially fund it were enabled to contribute “ideas to the scriptwriting process” and “ultimately decide which of two separate scripts Hanson has written will go into production.”⁸³⁰ More specifically, investors who paid a small subscription fee were allowed to participate in areas like writing and filming.⁸³¹ Echoing some of the idealistic rhetoric found within the crowdsourcing discourse detailed in the previous chapter, in an interview with Irene Cassarino and Wolf Richter, Hanson himself suggests that the partially crowdsourced project was intended as an alternative to Hollywood's proprietary and hierarchical mode of media production.⁸³² Furthermore, while acknowledging that crowdsourcing is a key part of the project's open and distributed mode of production, Cassarino and Richter themselves reinforce this project's utopian and transgressive self-image by claiming that the “Open Content Movie

⁸³⁰Howe, *Crowdsourcing: How the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, 255

⁸³¹Weiler, “Crowdsourcing,” 42; Irene Cassarino and Wolf Richter, “Swarm Creativity – The Legal and Organizational Challenges of Open Content Film Production,” DIME Working Paper No. 45, in *Dime Working Papers on Intellectual Property Rights*, ed. B. Andersen (London: Birbeck College, 2008), 29, <http://www.dime-eu.org/files/active/0/WP45-IPR.pdf>.

⁸³²Cassarino and Richter, “Swarm Creativity,” 4-5, 18.

Production” it reflects actually empowers creators.⁸³³ Despite this positive outlook on the project, Hanson's *Swarm of Angels* was never finished and its Web platform is now defunct. Similarly, despite its own self-representation as an alternative to Hollywood filmmaking within interviews and article,⁸³⁴ another media crowdsourcing project named *Lost Zombies*, a social network launched in 2008 and designed to crowdsource user-submitted footage for a fictional documentary about the zombie apocalypse, never produced a film and the online platform is no longer accessible. Likewise, launched in the same year, another similarly zombie-themed project entitled *Nation Undead* would use crowdsourcing to collect user-generated film shorts for nine chapters in a media series detailing the fictional spread of a zombie outbreak in the United States.⁸³⁵ Like *Lost Zombies*, however, this crowdsourcing project stopped being active a few years afterwards.⁸³⁶ While undermining the utopian characterization of crowdsourcing as an alternative offering a form of creative empowerment to participants and creators within discourse about the practice, these failures also illustrate the importance of the participatory agency of online users and their sustained engagement within original media crowdsourcing projects and how difficult it is for project organizers to successfully channeling it and the diversity of perspectives and contributions that result from it, especially if they are truly sincere about collaborating with users, incorporating their input within a project, and allowing it to directly shape its final form.

Although these initial attempts to use crowdsourcing to produce an original media text resulted in failure or were abandoned due to a lack of sustained participation from online users and the organizers themselves, other early participatory projects relying on a certain amount of crowdsourcing to create a novel media production — which, conversely, were successfully

⁸³³Cassarino and Richter, “Swarm Creativity,” 29.

⁸³⁴“Interview with Skot Leach of 'Lost Zombies,' *Shared Story Worlds*, July 15th, 2011, <http://sharedstoryworlds.com/2011/07/interview-with-skot-leach-of-lost-zombies/>; Heather Wixson, “Exclusive: Lost Zombies: An Experiment in Community Filmmaking,” *Dread Central*, April 16th, 2009, <http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/11265/exclusive-lost-zombies-an-experiment-in-community-filmmaking/>; David Bayon, “Lost Zombies: the DIY Movie Apocalypse,” *PC PRO*, March 17th, 2009, <http://www.pcpro.co.uk/blogs/2009/03/17/lost-zombies-the-diy-movie-apocalypse/>; “25 New Faces of Independent Film,” *Filmmaker Magazine*, Summer 2009, http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/summer2009/25faces_2.php#.VQI1p0I4IZY

⁸³⁵“Nation Undead Explained,” *YouTube*, YouTube video, 3:05, posted by “nationundead,” July 3rd, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSrHa5XWIKU>; “Nation Undead,” *YouTube*, YouTube video, 1:25, posted by “nationundead,” July 3rd, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yrp3Z3ncd50>

⁸³⁶Geoff King, *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in Contemporary American Indie Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 96.

completed — failed to empower participants in the radical manner initially claimed by their organizers and the proponents of crowdsourcing addressed in the previous chapter. As a result, such projects anticipate the similar type of power asymmetry and exploitation marking later media crowdsourcing projects like this chapter's central case study, *Life in a Day*. For instance, later associated with the growing crowdsourcing phenomenon within a 2011 article within *The Guardian* by writer Ellen E. Jones,⁸³⁷ MySpace and Vertigo Films's MyMovieMashup contest launched in 2007 promised to enable a winning director and the My Space platform's community to participate in the first 'user-generated film' and contribute to its production including its cast and script. The film eventually produced, *Faintheart* (2008), was a project conceived by Vito Rocco, a contest participant who was ultimately chosen and voted in by over 500, 000 MySpace users after he submitted a short film for evaluation, was shortlisted with 11 other competing directors, and picked to be one of three finalists by an external panel of judges selected by the project's organizers.⁸³⁸ However, although three bands has their music included within the film's soundtrack following their participation in a later part of the MyMovieMashup competition, it was ultimately revealed by commentators and its creators within various publications to have included a very minimal amount of input or participation from MySpace's users when it came to the project's final form.⁸³⁹ The film's leading roles, for instance, were offered to professional actors like Eddie Marsan despite the project's supposedly open casting process and MySpace contributors were not allowed to contribute footage for the film or participate in the construction of its visual form.⁸⁴⁰ Moreover, although one participant did receive a larger supporting role as the protagonist Richard's boss Simon, only 10 participants out of 1, 400 user auditions were offered minor roles as extras or fleeting side characters in the film and very little input on its script from the community was incorporated into the final product according to screenwriter

⁸³⁷Ellen E. Jones, "The Amazon Movie Revolution...One Year On," *The Guardian*, December 1st, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/dec/01/amazon-studios-revolution>

⁸³⁸ "Faintheart, a movie born on MySpace, was savaged by the critics – but it's still a landmark moment for the movie industry," *The Scotsman*, Feb. 3rd, 2009, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/faintheart-a-movie-born-on-myspace-was-savaged-by-the-critics-but-it-s-still-a-landmark-moment-for-the-movie-industry-1-827569>

⁸³⁹Chris Albrecht, "MySpace "UGC" Movie is Missing the "U,'" *Gigaom*, October 23rd, 2007, <https://gigaom.com/2007/10/23/myspace-ugc-movie-is-missing-the-u/>; Sheila Johnston, "Is 'Faintheart' Just a Gimmick?," *The Telegraph*, July 5th, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3555740/Is-Faintheart-just-a-gimmick.html>; and "Faintheart, a movie born on MySpace, was savaged by the critics – but it's still a landmark moment for the movie industry," *The Scotsman*, Feb. 3rd, 2009, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/faintheart-a-movie-born-on-myspace-was-savaged-by-the-critics-but-it-s-still-a-landmark-moment-for-the-movie-industry-1-827569>

⁸⁴⁰Sheila Johnston, "Is 'Faintheart' Just a Gimmick?," *The Telegraph*, July 5th, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3555740/Is-Faintheart-just-a-gimmick.html>

David Lemon.⁸⁴¹ Ultimately, very little content, script ideas, or performances from participating MySpace users were crowdsourced and included in the final film. Allan Niblo, co-founder of production company Vertigo Films behind MySpace's MyMovieMashup contest, would even admit that the project was “borne out of marketing” and the desire to “get awareness of our film out there without spending millions of pounds?” rather than any true wish to collaborate with the MySpace community.⁸⁴² Despite promising MySpace users that they would be included in the production of the chosen director's film, the organizers of the MyMovieMashup project merely exploited the still present novelty of processes like crowdsourcing and concepts such as “user-generated content” along with the utopian discourse of empowerment surrounding the Web 2.0 paradigm itself, so they could attract and then harness the productivity of the online crowd. More specifically, they channeled the immaterial labour of the MySpace community, particularly the communicative and social products resulting from their interactions with each other and other online users about the project, so they could increase the amount of attention directed towards the film that was eventually produced by the one participant whose input did significantly shape *Faintheart*: chosen director Vito Rocco. Contrary to the various utopian promises contained inside its open call, the use of crowdsourcing within the MyMovieMashup project was thus designed to serve the promotional and profit-driven interests of film production and distribution company Vertigo Films. Contemporaneous to MySpace's experiment with crowdsourcing in conjunction with Vertigo films, other online platforms like the now defunct Massify.com would, however, similarly: promise a more democratic and collaborative form of film production; crowdsource particular story pitches, ideas, and auditions from users for less deceptive projects; and then allow fellow users to vote for the winning contributors who will receive reward money and financial support from the platform itself and partners like After Dark Films to bring these selected projects to life — projects like the horror film *Perkins 14* (2009).⁸⁴³ Nevertheless, as

⁸⁴¹Sheila Johnston, “Is 'Faintheart' Just a Gimmick?,” *The Telegraph*, July 5th, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3555740/Is-Faintheart-just-a-gimmick.html>; “Faintheart, a movie born on MySpace, was savaged by the critics – but it's still a landmark moment for the movie industry,” *The Scotsman*, Feb. 3rd, 2009, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/faintheart-a-movie-born-on-myspace-was-savaged-by-the-critics-but-it-s-still-a-landmark-moment-for-the-movie-industry-1-827569>

⁸⁴²“Faintheart, a movie born on MySpace, was savaged by the critics – but it's still a landmark moment for the movie industry,” *The Scotsman*, Feb. 3rd, 2009, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/faintheart-a-movie-born-on-myspace-was-savaged-by-the-critics-but-it-s-still-a-landmark-moment-for-the-movie-industry-1-827569>

⁸⁴³ For details about Massify.com and its partially crowdsourced projects like *Perkins 14*, see King, *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in Contemporary American Indie Film*, 97-98; Charles Lyon, “Giving the Outsiders a Say on Movies,” *New York Times*, March 10th, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/10/business/media/>

will be seen within some of the other media crowdsourcing projects addressed in this chapter like *Life in a Day* and the next, the deceptive misrepresentations and the lack of transparency seen within the MyMovieMashup project are often present within the crowdsourcing campaigns for other film and media projects, which also misleadingly promise an empowering, creatively fulfilling, and collaborative form of participation within a truly novel and historic enterprise, so as to encourage users to participate for little compensation within them and thus benefit their managers and owners.

Foreshadowing the hierarchical relationship between participants and project organizers and the limited participation that will be later uncovered within this chapter's analysis of YouTube's supposedly collaborative crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day*, many of these earlier instances of media crowdsourcing projects would also similarly fail to offer a truly collaborative and participatory relationship with their participating users and the radically empowering democratization that it would entail. Instead, as already suggested in an earlier paragraph, they would frequently accord a disproportionate amount of control to their professional organizers, thus echoing the power asymmetry and hierarchical binary between professional managers and amateur participants perpetuated by crowdsourcing discourse and described in the previous chapter. Moreover, although these managers would still continue to frame these projects as collaborative, this longstanding reality usefully reveals how the limited type of collaboration often involved within media crowdsourcing project is more akin to the previously mentioned alternative understanding of the concept by Johnson described in this dissertation's introduction. This differing conception of the term highlights how, rather than signifying an egalitarian relationship between equal entities wherein they both possess a comparable amount of power and input, contemporary collaborations involving media organizations and other stakeholders are often better characterized as voluntarily entered relationships marked by complicity with — and willing subservience to — a more powerful enemy. Reflecting the unequal power relations that are frequently present within early media crowdsourcing projects and the collaborative relationships they foster with their voluntary participants, the open-ended and partially

10massify.html?ex=1362801600&en=ebad055a623478bc&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss; Shahnaz Mahmud, "Horror Pros to Produce E-Movies," *Adweek*, February 14th, 2008, <http://www.adweek.com/digital/horror-pros-produce-e-movie-94921/>; and Kyle Rupperecht, "Craig Singer Looks to the Internet for Perkins' 14," *MovieMaker*, October 21st, 2008, <https://www.moviemaker.com/archives/moviemaking/producing/articles-producing/craig-singer-looks-to-the-internet-for-perkins-14-20080828/>

crowdsourced mode of production adopted by *Swarm of Angels* would be revealed by Hanson to be non-democratic, but still "collaborative," even though he has "overall control" over it.⁸⁴⁴ Furthermore, in an interview with ZDNET, he provides further evidence of the disproportionate amount of power that he possesses over the project as its over-arching manager when he compares the latter role to being a "benevolent dictator."⁸⁴⁵ Likewise, despite the representation of the sci-fi film project *Iron Sky* — started in 2007 — as a novel project that uses crowdsourcing in order to collaborate and substantively involve an audience in the production of a creative work,⁸⁴⁶ Vuorensola would admit in a 2012 interview that he had complete control over the final product:

It's really important, whenever I work with the community, that they understand this has nothing to do with democracy. This is a pure dictatorship. Hur hur! I've seen people try to democratise the process of filmmaking on the internet and it always ends up really horrific.⁸⁴⁷

He would even claim in a separate article published the same year that if "you want to crowdsource you have to be very dominant."⁸⁴⁸ Further reflecting the unequal amount of control that he had over what was presented as a more deeply collaborative project for participants, when the film's low quality was falsely attributed to the script input of the crowd by certain critics, Vuorensola vehemently denied it, stating that:

They don't know what they're talking about. We never released the script to the community, so the fans never had input on the script. It wasn't a democracy. It was a dictatorship and I was the dictator! I decided what went into the film and what didn't. Besides, every film is a collaboration and therefore compromised in some way. Only here, the community was our co-collaborator.⁸⁴⁹

Due to this acknowledged power imbalance, Roig Telo would correctly judge *Iron Sky* to be a project that fails to offer participants the ability to affect its final form in any significant

⁸⁴⁴Adam P. Davies and Nicol Wistreich, *The Film Finance Handbook: How to Fund Your Film* (London: Netribution Limited, 2007), 166.

⁸⁴⁵Steve O'Hear, "A Swarm of Angels' Crowdsourcing Film Production," *ZDNet*, March 22nd, 2007, <http://www.zdnet.com/article/a-swarm-of-angels-crowdsourcing-film-production/>

⁸⁴⁶"Iron Sky – Producing with the Audience," YouTube Video, 3:44, May 12th, 2011, uploaded by "energiaproductions," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLRcUcg2TUI>

⁸⁴⁷Stephen Dalton, "Back To The Führer: Iron Sky Director Interviewed," *The Quietus*, March 7th, 2012, <http://thequietus.com/articles/08177-iron-sky-interview-timo-vuorensola>

⁸⁴⁸Ben Child, "Iron Sky doesn't stand out from the crowdsourcing," *Guardian*, May 23rd, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/may/22/iron-sky-crowd-sourcing-funding>

⁸⁴⁹Shannon Harvey, "'Moon nazi' movie launched by fans," *The West Australian*, May 10th, 2012. pg. 6.

manner.⁸⁵⁰ While simultaneously confirming how media crowdsourcing projects often continue to involve hierarchical relations despite the utopian discursive claims about collaboration surrounding them and the practice of crowdsourcing itself, Hanson and Vuorensola's respective characterizations of their relationship with participants within these early projects parallel Hyde, Johnson, and Condry's less utopian conceptions of "collaboration" in terms of its contingent character or its alternative suggestion of a form of compromise with others or with a powerful entity — different and more nuanced understandings that are increasingly gaining more traction within critical media scholarship about the Web 2.0 paradigm and networked forms of online user production. The reality of such hierarchies also lends further credence to Carpentier's intervention with debates about the character of participation within this same twenty first century digital media ecosystem wherein he acknowledges the former's potential situation within — and contribution to — relations of power and the structures that given them shape. Thus, the unequal amount of control that Hanson and Vuorensola admit to possessing within these early media crowdsourcing experiments foreground the previously mentioned need for scholars to revise and interrogate the common sense and more idealistic understandings of the seemingly substantial collaborative and participatory relationship between users and the organizers and owners of crowdsourcing projects and social media platforms and entities. As seen within the Web 2.0 discourse and related rhetoric about crowdsourcing analyzed in the previous chapters, the representation of online platforms and projects — which enable the distribution and sharing of user-driven media content — as neutral foundations for the creative empowerment, participation, and collaboration of average citizens and professionals often positions the relationship of users with their managers as being more harmonious and collaborative than in reality. In order to resist this misleading portrait, this chapter's analysis of the film crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day* will draw on the critical interventions within digital media scholarship previously summarized in the introduction and this chapter and thus be informed by their revised understandings of the meaning and character of dominant concepts and processes often discursively associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm and online forms of media production like crowdsourcing — concepts and practices like “collaboration” and "participation." While keeping in mind Hanson and Vuorensola's early flawed experiments involving the crowdsourcing of original media content, it will also pay close attention to the similar type of hierarchies and forms

⁸⁵⁰Roig Telo, “Participatory Film Production as Media Practice,” 2325-2326.

of inequality present within *Life in a Day* itself. Consequently, this case study analysis will dismantle the dominant discursive association of crowdsourcing with a utopian Web 2.0 narrative of participatory and collaborative empowerment by acknowledging the power differences that exist within any collaborative media production and by investigating the degree and type of collaboration present within media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day*.

YouTube's *Life in a Day* and the Global Documentary Mosaic Genre

Following an earlier crowdsourcing experiment devised by YouTube for the promotion of its brand image as a global platform for user creativity — the YouTube Symphony Orchestra that gathered its users to form a loose group of musicians in order to publicly perform together at Carnegie Hall and the Sydney Opera House in 2009 and 2011, respectively — YouTube's documentary and archival crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day* (2011) was launched shortly afterwards and was similarly constructed with a promotional purpose: to celebrate and highlight the social media platform's fifth anniversary.⁸⁵¹ Created in conjunction with cult director Ridley Scott's production company Scott Free Productions, sponsors like LG Electronics, and Scott himself as the lead producer, the documentary project embodies the executory creative mode of participation detailed by Literat and invited YouTube users to participate within it by freely creating and uploading footage of their lives captured on July 24th, 2010, which, if chosen, would be eventually edited into a linear and global documentary portrait or mosaic of the world at a specific moment in time with a complete film score. This post-production work would be undertaken by director Kevin MacDonald, executive producer Ridley Scott, editor Joe Walker, and composers Harry Gregson-Williams and Matthew Herbert. According to Walker, roughly 81,000 clips were ultimately submitted by creative users to YouTube for *Life in a Day*.⁸⁵² Further reinforcing the sheer size and global character of the connected crowd of participants contributing to it, *Life in a Day*'s opening text itself even asserts that the documentary film project "received 4,500 hours of video from 192 countries."⁸⁵³

Life in a Day, however, was preceded by similar participatory media projects with very different motivations like Yann Arthus-Bertrand's *6 Billion Others* (2003-present) video series,

⁸⁵¹Angela Watercutter, "Life in a Day Distills 4,500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary," *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>

⁸⁵²"Life in a Day: A New Type of Filmmaking," YouTube video, 2:54, posted by "Life in a Day," Dec. 14th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf1AI3_qX7c&index=43&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe4l2pAw

⁸⁵³*Life in a Day*. Directed by Kevin McDonald. Toronto, ON: Mongrel Media, 2011. DVD.

now retitled *7 Billion Others*, which sought to aggregate a series of individual video testimonials from all over the world in order to represent the world's diversity, but also, in the latter case, to better enable people to understand each other. More importantly, the launch of *Life in a Day* was also preceded by — and contemporaneous with — director Kyle Ruddick's highly similar *One Day on Earth* project begun in 2008 and launched in 2009, which also attempted to represent the world within a 24 hour time frame with the help of online participants uploading video footage captured on October 10th, 2010 to an archival platform.⁸⁵⁴ Simultaneously taking the form of a persistent geo-tagged, online archive and media sharing site composed of video content by its global community of filmmakers and launched in April 2010 at OneDayonEarth.org with the help of social media platform and network, Vimeo and Ning, respectively,⁸⁵⁵ Ruddick's *One Day on Earth* — another incarnation of the global documentary mosaic genre of media crowdsourcing — would also use the footage from this date and two other later dates, November 11th, 2011 and December 12th, 2012, with the intention of creating three documentary films representing the world's diversity and its most pressing social issues at different yearly intervals. However, only the 2010 edition of *One Day on Earth* has been edited into a full-length linear documentary and released in 2012. It reportedly had over 7,000 people from 190 countries send about 3,000 hours of footage — numbers which were openly offered to publications and foregrounded within the film's opening text to emphasize the scope and comprehensiveness of the resulting global portrait.⁸⁵⁶ Somewhat akin to *Life in a Day*, Ruddick and producer Brandon Litman have described *One Day on Earth's* goal as the creation of "a time capsule for the whole world to better understand itself."⁸⁵⁷ *One Day on Earth's* initial trailer would reinforce this impression by inviting participants to contribute to a “Document” and be part of a “Movement”

⁸⁵⁴Kyle Ruddick, “About One Day on Earth,” *One Day on Earth.org*, accessed January 17th, 2015, <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>

⁸⁵⁵Kyle Ruddick, “About One Day on Earth,” *One Day on Earth.org*, accessed January 17th, 2015, <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>; Radhika Marya, “How Thousands of Volunteer Filmmakers Captured 'One Day On Earth,'” *Mashable*, Jan. 18th, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/01/18/one-day-on-earth-archive/>; Brooks Barnes, “One Day on Earth' Seeks to Capture the World,” *The New York Times*, August 29th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/movies/one-day-on-earth-seeks-to-capture-the-world.html>

⁸⁵⁶Brooks Barnes, “One Day on Earth' Seeks to Capture the World,” *The New York Times*, August 29th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/movies/one-day-on-earth-seeks-to-capture-the-world.html>; Charles Dameron, “Filmmakers Capture 'One Day On Earth,’” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 21st, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/filmmakers_capture_one_day_on_earth/24555540.html; *One Day on Earth*. DVD. Directed by Kyle Ruddick. Topanga, CA: One Day on Earth LLC, 2012.

⁸⁵⁷Charles Dameron, “Filmmakers Capture 'One Day On Earth,’” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 21st, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/filmmakers_capture_one_day_on_earth/24555540.html

that will enable us to “find out who we are.”⁸⁵⁸ However, according to Ruddick and Litman in various news reports and interviews, *One Day on Earth*, in a marked contrast with the contemporaneous *Life in a Day*, was not motivated by profit or the production of a single film, but by the creation of an ongoing collaborative movement, archive, network, and community propelled by a diverse and global range of filmmakers.⁸⁵⁹ This emphasis on the project's goal of creating and enabling a community and a platform that would allow further collaborations between filmmakers is even reiterated within a published list of its founding principles and other video content promoting it.⁸⁶⁰ Further cementing this communitarian image, in a 2012 Vienna talk, Ruddick would even declare the adoption of a “community model” where participants taking ownership of the project's guiding ideas to be the reason for its success.⁸⁶¹ Moreover, Ruddick himself would even publicly distance *One Day on Earth* in this same TED talk and *The Guardian* from the rewards-based motivations often associated with more commercial and competitive incarnations of 'crowdsourcing' like *Life in a Day* and from the dehumanizing and capitalistic implications of the concept itself and related words like 'user' and 'the crowd', preferring instead to treat and view participants as engaged “people.”⁸⁶² This effort to distance the project from crowdsourcing's usually commercial motivations is also present within other public statements by Ruddick and Litman — within news reports and promotional videos —

⁸⁵⁸“One Day on Earth – Original Trailer,” Vimeo Video, 2:28, posted by “One Day on Earth,” April 25th, 2010, <http://vimeo.com/11215112>

⁸⁵⁹ For such claims by Ruddick and Litman, see Brooks Barnes, “One Day on Earth’ Seeks to Capture the World,” *The New York Times*, August 29th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/movies/one-day-on-earth-seeks-to-capture-the-world.html>; Mark Johanson, “‘One Day On Earth’ Debuts Worldwide, Offers Time Capsule Of Our Lives,” *International Business Times*, April 21st, 2012, <http://www.ibtimes.com/‘one-day-earth’-debuts-worldwide-offers-time-capsule-our-lives-440146>; Peter Rudegair, “Final chapter of “One Day on Earth” trilogy filmed worldwide,” *Reuters*, Dec. 12th, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/13/entertainment-us-oneday-idUSBRE8BC01V20121213>; R.T. Watson, “Film One Day on Earth Eyes New Life in Theaters,” *Reuters*, August 8th, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/08/us-onedayonearth-idUSTRE77760B20110808>; Anna Brones, “Our Shared Humanity: An Interview with the Filmmakers Behind ‘One Day on Earth,’” *Ecosalon*. April 21st, 2012, <http://ecosalon.com/our-shared-humanity-an-interview-with-the-filmmakers-behind-one-day-on-earth/>
⁸⁶⁰“Founding Principles,” *One Day on Earth*, accessed January 17th, 2015, <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>;
 Kyle Ruddick, “CV Interview with Kyle,” Vimeo Video, 2:38, posted by “One Day on Earth,” June 8th, 2010, <http://vimeo.com/12415955>

⁸⁶¹Kyle Ruddick, “One Day on Earth: Every Country at the Same Time: Kyle Ruddick at TEDxVienna,” Youtube video, 18:05, posted by “TEDxtalks,” December 8th, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzZ_Qis8gSo

⁸⁶² Kyle Ruddick, “One Day on Earth: Every Country at the Same Time: Kyle Ruddick at TEDxVienna,” *YouTube*, Youtube video, 18:05, posted by “TEDxtalks,” December 8th, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzZ_Qis8gSo; Ellen E. Jones, “The Amazon Movie Revolution: Amazon.com's movie studio promised to throw the development process open to the masses. One year on, how has the crowdsourced screenplay caught on,” *The Guardian*, December 2nd, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/dec/01/amazon-studios-revolution>

about *One Day on Earth's* activist goals and its public partnership with over 60 international non-profit and grassroots organizations.⁸⁶³ It is also felt through the 'Causes' feature of the project's Web platform, which enabled participants to join a cause associated with one of these non-profit partners, allow it to guide the subject of their archival content, and enable other members to use the former to draw further attention to the cause.⁸⁶⁴ *One Day on Earth's* non-commercial positioning is also more explicitly reinforced by its publicized connection to non-profit organizations like the Ford Foundation or, more importantly, the related One Day on Earth Foundation.⁸⁶⁵ Likewise, reinforcing this image of the project, its organizers would even declare in several publications that all potential profits derived from ticket and DVD sales of the finished film would go to their non-profit foundation and local charities.⁸⁶⁶ The non-commercial and activist stance of the *One Day on Earth* project even manifests itself within the completed documentary constructed from the 2010 footage of participants, non-profits, and experts highlighting global issues like climate change, poverty, income inequality, war, and genocide. Since its conception, *One Day on Earth* — a precursor and contemporary to *Life in a Day* — presented itself as a platform for a motivated community of socially conscious and activist media creators to construct a culturally beneficial film and video archive whose content can then be used by anyone to inform viewers about the pressing issues presently affecting humanity. Through this characterization and the non-profit motivation behind *One Day on Earth's* use of crowdsourcing to collect user-generated media, its organizers promised participants that they

⁸⁶³ See John Young, "One Day on Earth' documentary: Visit every country in the world this Earth Day," *Entertainment Weekly*, April 20th, 2012, <http://insidemovies.ew.com/2012/04/20/one-day-on-earth-documentary/>; Radhika Marya, "How Thousands of Volunteer Filmmakers Captured 'One Day On Earth,'" *Mashable*, Jan. 18th, 2011, <http://mashable.com/2011/01/18/one-day-on-earth-archive/>; and Anna Brones, "Our Shared Humanity: An Interview with the Filmmakers Behind 'One Day on Earth,'" *Ecosalon*, April 21st, 2012, <http://ecosalon.com/our-shared-humanity-an-interview-with-the-filmmakers-behind-one-day-on-earth/>; "Behind the Scenes – Part 1," Vimeo Video, 3:14, posted by "One Day on Earth," October 9th, 2011, <http://vimeo.com/30283428>

⁸⁶⁴ Dylan Stableford, "'One Day on Earth': Film with footage from every country on earth captured on same day makes its debut," *Yahoo News*, April 22nd, 2012, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/one-day-earth-film-footage-every-country-earth-173153006.html>

⁸⁶⁵ Kyle Ruddick, "About One Day on Earth," *One Day on Earth*, accessed January 17th, 2015, <http://www.onedayonearth.org/about>; Dylan Stableford, "'One Day on Earth': Film with footage from every country on earth captured on same day makes its debut," *Yahoo News*, April 22nd, 2012, <http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/one-day-earth-film-footage-every-country-earth-173153006.html>; "One Day on Earth; First Film Ever to Include Footage Filmed in Every Country on Earth -- on the Same Day," *China Weekly News*, April 24th, 2012, 112.

⁸⁶⁶ Brooks Barnes, "One Day on Earth' Seeks to Capture the World," *The New York Times*, August 29th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/movies/one-day-on-earth-seeks-to-capture-the-world.html>; Frank Scheck, "One Day on Earth: Film Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 4th, 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/one-day-on-earth-film-review-332672>

would be all able to share in the social and communal benefits of the project while being empowered as members of the supposedly collaborative community it cultivates and as a result of the culturally beneficial effects their participation would cause. As will be elaborated in this dissertation's conclusion, while they often retain the same centralized form of management and hierarchical power relations between project organizers and participants as their more commercial counterparts like this chapter's core case study *Life in a Day*, non-profit uses of crowdsourcing to collect original user-generated media content tend to avoid the latter's more significant privatization of benefits and, as a result, partially circumvent the greater power imbalance, inequality, and exploitation that frequently appears within competing instances of media crowdsourcing driven by profit and marketing.

In contrast to the contemporaneous non-profit media crowdsourcing project *One Day on Earth* by Ruddick and its avoidance of physical or experiential rewards for a select amount of winning participants within a competition or of profit for its organizers, YouTube's *Life in a Day* was intended to: promote Google's platform on its fifth anniversary and the brand of LG Electronics; increase the amount of user interactions and monetizable viewers within it; and to cheaply crowdsource user-generated content from YouTube to create a film and possibly achieve some form of profit from the uncompensated and free labour of its users. However, while its user participants were informed from the outset that they would not be financially compensated for their video contributions according to the project's official rules and terms, these same documents did promise that they would be credited as co-directors, but only if their submissions were chosen for inclusion, thus framing the chosen contributors as empowered collaborators who would be credited as co-authors and gaining a comparable level of exposure as *Life in a Day*'s organizers like director Kevin MacDonald.⁸⁶⁷ Moreover, as communicated within an official blog and other reports on the project, all submitted footage adhering to the project's guidelines, whether inserted in the film or not, were also promised to be included within a separate, interactive, and mosaic-like *Life in a Day* gallery that would function, like the parallel *One Day on Earth* project, as a more expansive time capsule for future generations.⁸⁶⁸ When released in

⁸⁶⁷“FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; “Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁸⁶⁸“YouTube Totals 80,000 Days,” *Shoot* 51, no. 6 (Aug 20, 2010): 6; “Official Google Blog: Life in a Day,” *Google Blog*, July 6th, 2010, <http://googleblog.blogspot.ca/2010/07/life-in-day.html>; “FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>

September 2010, this gallery took on the form of a matrix or a 3D globe, enabling users to interactively sort the videos according to geography, time of day, mood, and other criteria.⁸⁶⁹ By framing this gallery and its wider and more inclusive representation of the world's contributions as empowering all participants by democratically and visibly including their participation within the project in some form and offering them a culturally beneficial archival resource that they can all share in, *Life in a Day* reinforces the narrative of individual and collective empowerment through the democratization of cultural participation and the positive fantasy of global connection and inclusion, which are often associated with the Web 2.0 paradigm and practice of crowdsourcing. More importantly, it extends these discursive associations to Google's *Life in a Day* project, but, more importantly, to its social media platform YouTube, thus strengthening its utopian brand image as a foundation for the creative empowerment of average citizens all over the world. Through the above promises of creative empowerment for amateur users and the adoption of an open-ended platform like YouTube or inclusive features like the gallery, *Life in a Day*'s organizers were adopting discursive and non-discursive strategies, which sought to encourage and include a greater range of participation. These strategies were thus highly similar to the strategies of participatory inclusion and the type of idealistic discourse strategically deployed by YouTube and MCNs — strategies detailed in the previous section's chapters and embodying the apparatus of flexible control driving communicative capitalism.

However, while the archival incarnation of *Life in a Day* as an accessible gallery and, thus, a more genuine time-capsule seemingly promised to include all participants who adhered to its rules and give their work some exposure to the online users interested in consulting it, the project's FAQ section and its stated rules and terms revealed it to be a crowdsourcing contest. As has already been foregrounded in previous chapters and will be elaborated later, such guidelines and contractual conditions and terms have become other strategic means of flexibly controlling the creative agency of users. They are thus a core part of the overall apparatus supporting the commercial interests of Web 2.0 platforms and their surrounding media companies and corporate entities like MCNs. More relevant at this moment, however, is how they shape and discursively encourage the participatory agency of users within media crowdsourcing projects. Within the

⁸⁶⁹“Explore the Life in a Day Gallery,” *YouTube Official Blog*, September 5th, 2010, <http://youtube-global.blogspot.ca/2010/09/explore-life-in-day-video-gallery.html>; Christina Warren, “YouTube's Life in the Day Gets an Interactive Gallery,” *Mashable*, Sept. 6th, 2010, <http://mashable.com/2010/09/06/life-in-a-day-gallery-youtube/>

FAQ and the official rules and terms for this contest, it was determined that only the 20 contributors who submitted the best footage included in its linear documentary version would be chosen as a Director's Selection Prize Winner, a choice of words that frames the winners as part of an elite chosen by MacDonald, the film's true "Director."⁸⁷⁰ The contest prize attached to the title of "Director's Selection Prize Winner" consists of a trip to the film's January 2011 premiere at the Sundance Film Festival alongside MacDonald, a material reward that also promises public exposure and recognition for the film's individual contributors as well as an increased amount of cultural capital due to their inclusion as distinguished filmmakers within a prestigious festival environment.⁸⁷¹ The above type of framing and implicit promises within the rules and terms of *Life in a Day* discursively evoke an affectively satisfying image of individual creative empowerment that is intended to elicit the productive participation and collaboration of online users and, given the project's success, can be said to have achieved that very goal. In addition, the personal character of these rewards for contributors is a product of the YouTube platform's individualist focus on user channels and complements what Susan Murray has characterized as its self-serving promise to empower users towards professionalism and celebrity in the media industry.⁸⁷² Driven by YouTube's ability to enable isolate users to upload videos onto the platform with no architectural option to download some of them and collaborate with others in their creation, *Life in a Day* with its complementary focus of on the uni-directional submission of content by users — in spite of its implicit framing as a more collaborative enterprise — also lends credence to Burgess and Green's contention that, contrary to "its community rhetoric, YouTube's architecture and design invite individual participation, rather than collaborative activity."⁸⁷³ Embodying this shift away from more collective and community-driven forms of participation, *Life in a Day*'s individualist focus on the user as contributor and potential contest winner parallels what Dean has witnessed as an emblematic aspect of communicative capitalism, which is the shift from contract-based labour and wages to labour produced for a contest in order

⁸⁷⁰"FAQs," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; "Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁸⁷¹"FAQs," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; "Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁸⁷²See "Our Vision," *YouTube*, accessed April 1st, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/jobs/vision.html>; Susan Murray, "Amateur Auteur?: The Cultivation of Online Video Partners and Creators," in *Media Authorship*, eds. Cynthia Chris and David A. Gerstner (New York: Routledge, 2013), 266-270.

⁸⁷³Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 65.

to win a limited amount of prizes, a state of affairs that she argues entails “the mobilization of the many to produce the one.”⁸⁷⁴ She also states that such contests privilege “those who have the resources to take risks as they transfer costs associated with doing work to contestants,” which perpetuates “neoliberalism's basic mechanism of socializing risk and privatizing reward” and encourages crowds of individuals to work for the mere chance at pay or an extrinsic reward.⁸⁷⁵ In her view, this extension of the “logic of the prize [...] into an acceptable work relation” accords the power of a judge to the prize giver who “has no obligation to any of the contestants.”⁸⁷⁶ Even though there is more than “one” winner derived from the “many” who contributed to *Life in a Day*, the power difference outlined by Dean is more pronounced in this case because no winner receives any form of monetary compensation for their labour. Moreover, the power associated with the stated role of MacDonald as contest judge and leading “Director” undercuts the promise of greater creative partnership and empowerment for participants that is imbued in the designation “co-director” and its suggestion of a substantive form of co-authorship. In other words, the structure of the contest established by its stated rules and terms significantly limit the degree of participation afforded by the project itself. Furthermore, while further developed later in this chapter, the contest rules' privileging of the user-participant with its promise of individual rewards and empowerment can also be felt within *Life in a Day's* crowdsourcing campaign and the personal form of creative empowerment, rewards, and benefits that it promises to users for participating. More importantly, as already indicated by the power hierarchy embedded within the contest structure of the project or the logic of the prize as argued by Dean, the continuing disempowerment of individual participants within *Life in a Day* despite the creative agency it affords them will also be further highlighted within the rest of this chapter.

Life in a Day's Commercial Motivation and its Discursive Denial

Despite promising a substantial form of creative empowerment to individual participants within its open call and its associated guidelines, *Life in a Day's* creative and novel use of crowdsourcing to convert user-generated content into a prestigious and original cinematic text, as already suggested earlier, was always constructed as a means to primarily empower its organizers. Through the deployment of this seemingly innovative practice to produce a film and

⁸⁷⁴Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 140.

⁸⁷⁵Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 141.

⁸⁷⁶Dean, *Communist Horizon*, 141.

the replication of the idealistic discourse of participatory empowerment surrounding it, *Life in a Day*'s organizers sought to strategically use the seemingly inclusive crowdsourcing process in order to strengthen the utopian vision of technologically-enabled global connection and creativity embedded within YouTube and LG Electronic's respective brand images, elevate the cultural status of their platforms and technologies, and draw more widespread attention to them within a twenty first century information economy. As stated by scholar James Andrew Wilson, what initially appears to be the central topic of the film — capturing a single day in the world — “is less the subject [...] than the social creative process itself, which is referenced far more than any elements of the film itself in publicity and reviews.”⁸⁷⁷ Moreover, he is correct to argue that YouTube's adoption of the seemingly novel process of crowdsourcing to aggregate “thousands of videos into a narrative of multiplicity, diversity and points of connection” was mainly driven by a desire to garner more positive attention to its platform and its user-generated content.⁸⁷⁸ According to a 2010 report in the *Edmonton Journal* and editor Joe Walker himself within a 2011 *Wired* article by Angela Watercutter, the initial idea to crowdsource a documentary portrait of the world was first created by YouTube in collaboration with Scott Free Productions, thus further foregrounding the project's status as a marketing enterprise originally constructed by Google in support of its platform.⁸⁷⁹ Complementing the latter's promotional intent for the project, MacDonald himself within articles for *The Wall Street Journal* has presented *Life in a Day* as a means to elevate YouTube's unappreciated amateur content into cinematic art.⁸⁸⁰ Further contributing to YouTube's goal, during the campaign and after the film's release, cultural critics like Gilles Hattersley and Bob Tourtelotte from the *Sunday Times* and the *Ottawa Citizen* would highlight the lofty artistic ambitions of the project's appropriation of user-generated amateur content.⁸⁸¹ Reinforcing YouTube's cultivated image as an impartial foundation for the creative

⁸⁷⁷James Andrew Wilson, “When is A Performance? Temporality in the Social Turn?,” *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 17.5 (2012): p. 113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2012.728450>.

⁸⁷⁸Andrew Wilson, “When is A Performance? Temporality in the Social Turn?,” p. 113.

⁸⁷⁹Angela Watercutter, “Life in a Day Distills 4, 500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary,” *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>; Geoff Boucher and Alex Pham, “YouTube project to capture Life in a Day,” *Edmonton Journal*, July 8th 2010, D.4.

⁸⁸⁰Rachel Dodes, “FRIDAY JOURNAL --- The Arena -- Documentary: 'Life in a Day': Patching YouTube Clips into a Movie Quilt,” *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition, 22 July 2011, D.4; Rachel Dodes, “‘Life in a Day’ Director Aims to Elevate YouTube Videos Into Art,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22nd, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/07/22/life-in-a-day-director-kevin-macdonald-aims-to-elevate-youtube-videos-into-art/?mod=google_news_blog

⁸⁸¹Giles Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” *Sunday Times*, July 25th, 2010, pg. 16; Bob Tourtelotte, “YouTube unveils Life in a Day film at Sundance; Thousands all over world contributed,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, Jan.

empowerment of citizens, MacDonald in Watercutter's article even attributes the original film project's very feasibility and existence to Google's platform and its users.⁸⁸² Furthermore, the *Life in a Day* project also extends a considerable degree of cinematic prestige to YouTube's brand through: the decision of its organizers to schedule its 2011 premiere at Sundance; its inclusion of respected artists like Scott, MacDonald, and Walker; and its open call's focus on MacDonald's status as a "Oscar-winning director."⁸⁸³

Life in a Day's transparent function as a marketing tool designed to improve the general perception of YouTube and draw more attention and participation to the platform, however, is actively masked by the strategic use of its organizers and participants' public testimonies and statements to frame the project as being driven by more artistic motivations. For instance, in an interview with CNN, its lead director MacDonald would oppositionally frame the project as a "reaction to the studio movies that are somewhat deadening artistically," claiming that he had "complete and utter artistic freedom."⁸⁸⁴ Likewise, in a video testimonial promoted by YouTube after *Life in a Day's* release, participant Christopher Brian Heerdt reveals his fears that the project would be a "2-hour YouTube commercial" only to conveniently dismiss this notion and, like MacDonald, argue in favour of its artistry.⁸⁸⁵ In the latter case, YouTube's appropriation of such positive testimony from amateur participants complements its intention to present the project as a non-commercial, authentic, and novel work that was designed to creatively empower users.

More importantly, this strategic discursive denial of *Life in a Day's* promotional and, hence, commercial function in favour of representing it as an ambitious cultural endeavour is also present within the various material that made up the project's open call and — akin to the often communal and non-commercial rhetoric found within Web 2.0 discourse and promulgated by YouTube itself — served as another affectively alluring means by which the project sought to attract the creative labour of potential participations. Again, this less direct strategy of

29th, 2011, C.2.

⁸⁸²Angela Watercutter, "Life in a Day Distills 4, 500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary," *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>

⁸⁸³Kevin MacDonald, "Kevin MacDonald on Life in a Day," Youtube video, 2:17, posted by "Life in a Day," July 1st, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_4uii96xqM&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw

⁸⁸⁴Abbey Goodman, "Filmmaker, YouTube Captures 'Life in a Day,'" *CNN*, July 27th, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Movies/07/27/life.in.a.day.goodman/>

⁸⁸⁵Christopher Brian, "One Year Later: Christopher Brian," YouTube video, 3:24, posted by "Life in a Day," October 4th, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFiAz3diEyE>

encouraging and including greater participation through the use of such Web 2.0 rhetoric is frequently deployed within the user-driven online media ecosystem that is being cultivated by communicative capitalism within the twenty first century. Exemplifying this approach, within its initial video-based open call for the project and its textual description, *Life in a Day* moves beyond the promise of personal rewards and characterizes itself as a “historic global experiment” intended to create a socially valuable “time capsule” of the world on July 24th.⁸⁸⁶ By framing *Life in a Day* as a novel and archival crowdsourcing experiment that is culturally beneficial to the wider online community like *One Day on Earth*, MacDonald masks the proprietary control that YouTube and its production partners hold over its production and, as a result, the fact that they will be its primary beneficiaries, not its participants. In a promotional video for the project within an article in the *Sunday Times* by Giles Hattersley, he again characterizes the project as possessing an anthropological and sociological purpose that is similar to the Mass-Observation project begun in 1930s Britain, which asked average citizens to document various aspects of their daily lives and submit their writings to its organizers.⁸⁸⁷ Echoing pre-existing analysis and commentary about the Mass-Observation movement,⁸⁸⁸ he even presents *Life in a Day*, in a video, as similarly enabling marginalized citizens – not experts - to communicate their socio-historical experiences and participate in social analysis.⁸⁸⁹ This explicit link of the Mass-Observation archives to *Life in a Day*'s promise of substantial empowerment and social value ultimately seeks to justify the project's appropriation of its participants' labour for little to no extrinsic reward while affectively motivating them into passionately contributing this labour and the resulting content in the hope of being a part of a significant and emotionally fulfilling collective endeavour that serves a larger social purpose. Solidifying this affectively attractive

⁸⁸⁶ Kevin MacDonald, “Kevin MacDonald on Life in a Day,” Youtube video, 2:17, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 1st, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_4uii96xqM&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe4l2pAw

⁸⁸⁷ Kevin MacDonald, “Kevin MacDonald at the Mass Observation Archive,” YouTube video, 4:07, posted by “Life in a Day,” Jul. 20th, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEQhy0oFE1w&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe4l2pAw&index=59>; Giles Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” *Sunday Times*, July 25th, 2010, pg. 16;

⁸⁸⁸ Nick Hubble, *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: Culture, History, Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 15; Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloome, *Writing Ourselves: Mass Observation and Literary Practices* (Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc., 2000), 7-8, 33, 41, 62; Ben Highmore, *Everyday life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 85-86; Murray Goot, “Mass Observation and Modern Public Opinion,” in *Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, ed. By Wolfgang Donsbach and Michael W. Trougett (Los Angeles: Sage Pub, 2008), 100.

⁸⁸⁹ Kevin MacDonald, “Kevin MacDonald at the Mass Observation Archive,” YouTube video, 4:07, posted by “Life in a Day,” Jul. 20th, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEQhy0oFE1w&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe4l2pAw&index=59>;

offer of membership within a larger socially valuable project and its community of participants, *Life in a Day's* open call and its FAQ also explicitly promised users that, by participating in the film, they would become “part of history.”⁸⁹⁰ This appeal specifically enticed them to be “part” of a historically novel creative work as well as the fragment of history that it would capture.⁸⁹¹

Reinforcing this representation of *Life in a Day* as a socially important and novel archival project driven by a connected group of participating collaborators, several of its organizers also tended to replicate YouTube's own discursively cultivated image as a communal space and similarly situate the individual YouTube users making up the project's contributing crowd as members of an online community rather than as isolated users. While complementing YouTube's own communitarian discourse, this characterization of *Life in a Day's* crowd of participants also reinforces the suggestion of “an imagined transnational community” that Graeme Turner has also partially attributed to the “analogous co-presence” experienced by the platform's users.⁸⁹² For instance, in several interviews, online articles, and press releases about the project, MacDonald has emphasized how *Life in a Day* engaged, harnessed, and necessitated the creativity of the YouTube “community” as well as the wider online community increasingly geared towards content sharing.⁸⁹³ Even Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, presents the project as giving the YouTube “community” an “opportunity to work with Kevin Macdonald and Ridley Scott.”⁸⁹⁴ This representation of the participating crowd as being part of a global and platform-centric community echoes crowdsourcing discourse's own propensity to portray project participants as being part of a coherent and empowered communal formation. However, as stated by Literat, the “lack of social encounter and face-to-face communication” often present within crowdsourced

⁸⁹⁰“Life in a Day,” YouTube video, 1:10, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 2nd, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMxuocCN1O0&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe412pAw>; “FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>

⁸⁹¹“Life in a Day,” YouTube video, 1:10, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 2nd, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMxuocCN1O0&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-grDe412pAw>

⁸⁹²Graeme Turner, *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 144.

⁸⁹³ See Rachel Dodes, “‘Life in a Day’ Director Aims to Elevate YouTube Videos Into Art,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22nd, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/07/22/life-in-a-day-director-kevin-macdonald-aims-to-elevate-youtube-videos-into-art/?mod=google_news_blog; “LG Electronics Partners YouTube on World's First 'Life in a Day' Project,” *LG.com*, July 22nd, 2010, <http://www.lg.com/eastafrica/press-release/lg-electronics-partners-you-tube-on-worlds-first-life-in-a-day-project>; Angela Watercutter, “Life in a Day Distills 4, 500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary,” *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>; Abbey Goodman, “Filmmaker, YouTube Captures 'Life in a Day,’” *CNN*, July 27th, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/Movies/07/27/life.in.a.day.goodman/>

⁸⁹⁴“LG Electronics Partners YouTube on World's First 'Life in a Day' Project,” *LG.com*, July 22nd, 2010, <http://www.lg.com/eastafrica/press-release/lg-electronics-partners-you-tube-on-worlds-first-life-in-a-day-project>

art projects like *Life in a Day* frequently obstructs the creation of a “community” and that, in these instances, “the crowd is still a crowd, not yet a community.”⁸⁹⁵ Making a similar, but different argument about the presence of a crowd within a crowdsourcing project, Jacob Silverstein, in a 2014 piece for *The Baffler*, claims that the “greatest deception of crowdsourcing is the notion that there is a crowd at all” because online participants are generally isolated from each other and “not assembled as a crowd.”⁸⁹⁶ Similarly, participants in YouTube's *Life in a Day* project are also isolated from each other and do not really form either a community or crowd. Nevertheless, similarly serving to repress the disempowered and isolated status of its participants, this communitarian characterization of *Life in a Day* and its participants parallels Web 2.0 discourse and ultimately masks its commercial motives and the significant control held over its final form by Google and organizers like MacDonald while also strategically extending the attractive Web 2.0 promise of an affectively satisfying communal experience in order to influence potential participants into contributing their labour to the project.

Life in a Day and the Narrative of Amateur Empowerment

Besides being misleadingly characterized as community-driven and socially beneficial product, the documentary crowdsourcing project *Life in a Day* would also continue to be strategically presented by its organizers as a means to empower average users through the technologically-enabled democratization of participation within the realm of media production that it supposedly affords. For example, MacDonald himself presents *Life in a Day* as an empowering project for participants when he situates it as part of the “democratization of filming” afforded by webcams, cellphones, and social media platforms like YouTube.⁸⁹⁷ In the project's video-based open call, MacDonald further perpetuates this narrative about the democratization of media creation when he speaks to YouTube's users and calls on them to “take your camera, [...], go and film something,” thus presenting *Life in a Day* as offering them an easy and simple opportunity to unleash their creative potential through the production of media and be participants within a larger artistic work.⁸⁹⁸ Similarly, an official video promoting *Life in a Day* contains on-screen text framing it as a “Film by You” and further reinforces this characterization

⁸⁹⁵Literat, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mediated Participation,” 2972.

⁸⁹⁶Jacob Silverstein, “The Crowdsourcing Scam,” *The Baffler* 26 (2014), <http://www.thebaffler.com/salvos/crowdsourcing-scam>

⁸⁹⁷Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” 16.

⁸⁹⁸Kevin MacDonald, “Kevin MacDonald on Life in a Day,” Youtube video, 2:17, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 1st, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_4uii96xqM&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe412pAw

of the project as a work that enables YouTube users to participate and be empowered as co-authors.⁸⁹⁹ In another video with Ridley Scott, this discourse of artistic empowerment is made explicit when he states that his very first film, which led to his first job, was about a “day in my life” and that, with digital technology, anyone can and should participate in the kind of filmmaking opportunity encouraged by the project.⁹⁰⁰ By connecting participation in the project to his career trajectory and constructing this implicitly aspirational narrative, Scott bolsters the promise of professionalization, exposure, and amateur empowerment associated with the *Life in a Day* project and with YouTube itself. Moreover, as remarked upon by Robert Goldrich, Scott’s utopian representation of digital technology and, by extension, the project as being accessible and enabling people to participate in the creative process — an idealistic narrative that supports YouTube’s utopian brand image — also complements the ‘Life’s Good’ marketing campaign of the project’s key corporate partner, LG Electronics.⁹⁰¹ As indicated in several press releases, this particular campaign was designed to communicate LG’s brand promise to make technology more accessible to consumers and showcase how it can enrich their lives.⁹⁰² The overall narrative of democratized media production and creative empowerment expressed within *Life in a Day*’s campaign material and its association with the technological products and media platforms of its key organizer and sponsor, YouTube and LG Electronics, ultimately benefit these two corporations by incentivizing citizens to independently buy or use their devices and platforms with the expectation of some substantial form of benefit or power. Evidently, as an affective-discursive strategy, its affectively attractive promise — one often made within Web 2.0 discourse and social media platforms more generally — also carried the potential to further evoke a positive emotional response within online users and further encourage their participation in the project, thus increasing its exposure and that of its associated brands. However, once visible, the commercial impetus for this narrative substantially undermines *Life in a Day*’s self-representation as a socially valuable and community-driven form of media production — a

⁸⁹⁹“Life in a Day,” YouTube video, 1:10, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 2nd, 2010,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMxuocCN1O0&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw

⁹⁰⁰ Ridley Scott, “Ridley Scott on Life in a Day,” YouTube video, 1:46, posted by “Life in a Day,” July 6th, 2010,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGYACultjCY&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw&index=62

⁹⁰¹ See Robert Goldrich, “Directors: Kevin MacDonald,” *Shoot* 51, no. 8 (Oct. 15th, 2010): 20, 28, EBSCOHost.

⁹⁰² “World Renowned Filmmakers Ridley Scott and Kevin MacDonald Ask YouTube Community to Capture ‘Life in a Day.’,” *LG.com*, July 24th, 2010, http://www.lg.com/eg_en/press-releases/world-renowned-filmmakers-ridley-scott-and-kevin-macdonald-ask-youtube-community-to-capture-life-in-a-day; “‘Life’s good’: Lg Launches Its Largest Ever UK Brand Marketing Campaign,” *LG.com*, April 20th, 2010, <http://www.lg.com/uk/press-release/lifes-good-lg-launches-its-largest-ever-uk-brand-marketing-campaign>

misleading characterization that actively serves to deny and suppress the logic of neoliberal capitalism driving it.

Beyond the official material that made up *Life in a Day*'s open call and the public statements of its organizers, many commentators would support the above characterization of the project as an empowering platform by arguing that it encourages and enables the democratization of media production and the empowerment of average citizens — a dominant narrative that, as already detailed in the previous chapters, is often encountered within discourse about the Web 2.0. paradigm and related practices like crowdsourcing. Exemplifying this external form of legitimization and partially echoing the utopian rhetoric about media crowdsourcing seen in the last chapter, Russell Smith within a 2011 article for *The Globe and Mail* suggests that *Life in a Day* communicates a democratic idea of creativity that encourages users to create.⁹⁰³ Likewise, Singer in her 2011 article from *The Independent* frames crowdsourced filmmaking as an “inherent democracy” and, as if to confirm this assertion, quotes MacDonald stating that *Life in a Day* gives a “voice to people who aren't usually given one around traditional forms of media and elitism.”⁹⁰⁴ Directly referencing *Life in a Day*, David Philip Green and his co-authors have underlined how such discourse about the democratizing and “empowering” nature of “participatory documentaries” is typical within various sources of commentary about the topic including texts written by reporters like Singer.⁹⁰⁵

Life in a Day and the Fantasy of a Radically Diverse and Global Crowd

Complementing this rhetoric about the democratization of participation, discussion about *Life in a Day* by its organizers and other commentators often echoes some of the more celebratory statements about Web 2.0 platforms and crowdsourcing projects' ability to include the viewpoints and labour of a truly diverse and global crowd and to connect them to each other. Specifically, it frequently reiterates the project's intention to channel a heterogeneity of perspectives from all over the world, perpetuating what Wilson has characterized as a discourse of “inclusion and empowerment.”⁹⁰⁶ For example, in a 2010 interview within the *Edmonton*

⁹⁰³Russell Smith, “Life in a Day -- A Shot of Artistic Inspiration From The Cloud,” *The Globe and Mail*, Feb. 3rd, 2011, R3.

⁹⁰⁴Leigh Singer, “Join cinema's new in-crowd,” *The Independent*, Jun. 15th, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/join-cinemas-new-in-crowd-2297390.html>

⁹⁰⁵David Philip Green et al., “Beyond Participatory Production: Digitally Supporting Grassroots Documentary,” in *CHI 2015, Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (New York: ACM, 2015), 3158, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702203>.

⁹⁰⁶Wilson, “When is A Performance? Temporality in the Social Turn?,” 113.

Journal, MacDonald reiterates the crowdsourcing project's mission to create an authentic time-capsule of the world when he expresses his desire for *Life in a Day* to include and authentically “represent a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, cultures and heritages as well as a broad range of ages.”⁹⁰⁷ Interestingly, this narrative of participatory inclusion constructed by organizers like MacDonald heavily relies on what Carpentier has viewed as the presumptive association of realist authenticity with the amateur media of independent participants.⁹⁰⁸ More importantly, in order to create a truly authentic mosaic of the world, the organizers of *Life in a Day* needed to adopt a strategy to expand participation to countries that had minimal online access to YouTube or lacked the necessary bandwidth to upload their submissions. Consequently, Google recruited the production company Against All Odds Productions in order to send “650 Fujifilm FinePix AV100 cameras to remote areas in about 40 countries.”⁹⁰⁹ Aside from the submitted clips of YouTube users, *Life in a Day*'s editor Joe Walker has stated that approximately 5,000 clips were acquired through these outreach cameras.⁹¹⁰ The global scope and diversity of the project's participants is further underlined during the resulting film's opening text informing the viewer of the participation of users from 192 countries.⁹¹¹ MacDonald argues that the eventual film's core message is “about connection,” thus perpetuating the project's utopian image of a world connected by the Internet and its native practices and platforms like YouTube.⁹¹² In this sense, *Life in a Day*'s theme of global connectivity parallels similar themes found by film scholars within the global incarnation of network narrative films.⁹¹³ Amanda Ciafone has argued that the transnational incarnation of the network narrative genre has come to represent — and be shaped by — the 'global' social relations now being cultivated within the neoliberal context of globalization emerging in the last two decades with the aid of the Internet.⁹¹⁴ More importantly,

⁹⁰⁷Boucher and Pham, “YouTube project to capture Life in a Day,” D.4.

⁹⁰⁸Carpentier, “Participation is Not Enough: The Conditions of Possibility of Mediated Participatory Practices,” 417.

⁹⁰⁹Robin Berger, “YouTube Solicits User Submissions for Life in a Day,” *Videography* 35, no. 9 (Sep 2010): 17, ProQuest.

⁹¹⁰“Life in a Day: A New Type of Filmmaking,” YouTube video, 2:54, posted by “Life in a Day,” Dec. 14th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf1AI3_qX7c&index=43&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw

⁹¹¹*Life in a Day*, directed by Kevin McDonald, (Toronto, ON: Mongrel Media, 2011), DVD.

⁹¹²“The Life in a Day World Premiere at Sundance: Q & A,” YouTube video, 42: 03, posted by “Life in a Day,” March 24th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2IhK5GV-g>

⁹¹³Vivien Silvey, “Pluralism and Cultural Imperialism in the Network Films Babel and Lantana,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49, no. 5 (2013): 585, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2013.842738>; Amanda Ciafone, “The Magical Neoliberalism of Network Films,” *International Journal of Communication* 8. (2014): 2684, 2687, 2698-2699, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2452/1213>.

⁹¹⁴Ciafone, “The Magical Neoliberalism of Network Films,” 2680-2682.

she asserts that this incarnation of the genre is part of a structure of feeling emphasizing worldwide human connectivity and networked relations, which coincides with this period and the emergence of capitalistic globalization and its interrelated systems.⁹¹⁵ Similarly, the global documentary mosaic genre of crowdsourced documentary filmmaking embodied by *Life in a Day* has emerged a little later in the same cultural and economic context and is a product of this same mostly positive structure of feeling that informed the pre-existing utopian rhetoric in the 1990s about the Internet and later became more dominant within Web 2.0 discourse. Nevertheless, while contemporaneously shaped by commentary about related Web 2.0 practices and platforms like YouTube, the frequently optimistic discourse surrounding the global documentary mosaic incarnation of media crowdsourcing projects, which is embodied by YouTube's *Life in a Day*, has only solidified and expanded the reach of this fantasy of a heterogeneous world that is connected and unified via networked communication.

Although, unlike Ruddick's resulting film *One Day on Earth*, it refrains from presenting multiple co-existing screens of contributor content from all over the world to suggest the global type of co-presence found on Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, the distinctive formal structure of *Life in a Day's* film version also continues to promulgate the impossible ideal of global connectivity perpetuated by its organizers and open call. For example, its quick visual juxtaposition of heterogeneous footage from radically different and often decontextualized cultural sources – no footage in the film is accompanied with information as to its original context unlike its contemporary *One Day on Earth* – further communicates a simplistic humanist image of international connection. Moreover, by being limited to the events of July 24th and compelled by the need to structure the footage of participants in order to create a global time-capsule, *Life in a Day's* artists are almost forced to choose to prioritize the shared daily experiences and similarities found within its video submissions. Somewhat akin to network narratives, which David Denby has framed as having “closed, even overdetermined, forms,”⁹¹⁶ the global documentary mosaic genre of media crowdsourcing holds a structure that will tend to emphasize similarity over difference. As articulated by Helga Lénárt-Cheng, through the extensive use of montage and parallel editing and due to the film project's choice to collect

⁹¹⁵Ciafone, “The Magical Neoliberalism of Network Films,” 2684-2687.

⁹¹⁶David Denby, “The New Disorder,” *The New Yorker*, March 5th, 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/03/05/the-new-disorder>

footage from a specific date, the film creates a universal sense of temporal simultaneity by structuring footage from different time zones in a way that traces a chronological narrative of July 24th from morning to night, thus marginalizing heterogeneous and divergent experiences of temporality in favour of consensus, similarity, and standardization.⁹¹⁷ More specifically, it evokes this sensation by intercutting between various clips of shared human experiences such as people waking up, cooking, washing themselves, eating, sleeping, expressing affection, getting married, giving birth, and experiencing death and loss. The film even uses persistent sounds like clapping, the music of Angolan women (“A Pedra”), or the song “A Day at a Time” over edited footage to visually link them together and reinforce its theme of global connectivity. Although the film often acknowledges the cultural differences and social inequalities that exist across countries within its montage sequences, this shallow representation of co-existence, connection, and similarity remains dominant. Consequently, Dovey dismisses *Life in a Day* as “a vacuous and superficial essay in 'one world' humanism” whose aggregated content is “devoid of argument, analysis, or narrative.”⁹¹⁸ Evidently, echoing MacDonald's articulated vision of a connected world and reinforcing through its style and content, the *Life in a Day* film itself implicitly communicates a similar narrative about a globally connected and creatively empowered community of participants brought together by Web-based platforms like YouTube and by online practices like crowdsourcing.

Moreover, the fantastical perception of crowdsourcing as a democratizing online practice that can include a truly global pool of participants within the realm of creative production is also implicitly expressed within the *Life in a Day* project and it informs the latter's persistent belief in the very possibility of constructing a totalizing portrait of the world with the help of the Internet. Evoking Jodi Dean's thoughts on communicative capitalism's fantastical representation of the Internet as being capable of accessing and connecting the world in its entirety, Rose and Dovey have argued that participatory documentaries akin to *Life in a Day* often contribute to a “revival of global humanism in the idea that somehow it is possible to represent *everyone and everything* through the infinite network architecture of the web.”⁹¹⁹ In their view, crowdsourcing-driven

⁹¹⁷Helga Lénárt-Cheng, “Concepts of Simultaneity and Community in the Crowd-sourced Video Diary *Life in a Day*,” *Cultural Politics*, 10, no. 1 (March 2014): 27, 28, 32, <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2397218>.

⁹¹⁸Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” 22.

⁹¹⁹Jon Dovey and Mandy Rose, “This Great Mapping of Ourselves” New Documentary Forms Online,” in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. Brian Winston, (Basingstoke: British Film Institute Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 374.

attempts to map the world like *Life in a Day* are thus reflective of a "globalised economy driven by the web" and deeply informed by a complementary belief in our highly connected and "common humanity," a belief that they argue should be resisted by remembering "the massive inequalities of wealth, gender and race that celebrations of 'one-world-ism' ignore" and, I would argue, actively mask.⁹²⁰ However, because this utopian vision of a world of human beings who are fully connected through the Web has remained a fantasy since its emergence in the 1990s, the global documentary mosaic genre of media crowdsourcing embodied by *Life in a Day* — which is informed by the persistence of this fantasy within Web 2.0 discourse and seeks to perpetuate it — can only fail to achieve its goal of including participants from all over the world and authentically representing it in its entirety and in all of its diversity.

For instance, as perpetuated by the *Life in a Day* project, this ideal of a globally connected crowd democratically empowered to participate in media production by networked digital technologies and Web 2.0. platforms, and practices like crowdsourcing — while existing as another of communitative capitalism's strategies to encourage productive forms of user-driven communication — also ultimately distracts citizens from recognizing how access to participatory opportunities is often unevenly distributed and how, in any form of participation, certain potential participants are always excluded or they do not get to participate to the same degree as others. Making a similar argument by drawing on the writings of Jacques Rancière, Dave Beech in a 2008 issue of *Art Monthly* foregrounds how participation as a process also constructs a social divide "between those who participate and those who don't" because it "does not and cannot include all" participants and, thus, inherently has to be "excluding" by its very nature.⁹²¹ Rancière's conception of orderly organization of the "police" replicates this different understanding of participation in that it affords certain parts, positions, and forms of activity to participants who are included, but withholds them from the excluded.⁹²² Supporting this understanding of participation, *Life in a Day's* utopian vision of crowdsourcing's capacity to include and access a truly global labour pool through the Web is undermined by its very need to ship high quality cameras to remote regions with inadequate bandwidth, internet access, or media

⁹²⁰Dovey and Rose, "This Great Mapping of Ourselves" New Documentary Forms Online," 372.

⁹²¹Dave Beech, "Include Me Out!", *Art Monthly* 315 (April 2008): 3.

⁹²²See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 12; Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28-29.

equipment in order to better achieve its impossibly inclusive and comprehensive portrait of the world. Furthermore, *Life in a Day* does exclude certain kinds of participants and it often fails to treat some of the contributors it includes as equals. For instance, while included in the project, participants who provide footage via the outreach cameras are excluded from the contest to win a trip to Sundance.⁹²³ Moreover, according to project's FAQ, participants can not be residents from "Iran, Syria, Cuba, Sudan, North Korea and Burma (Myanmar), and/or any other persons and entities restricted by US export controls and sanctions programmes."⁹²⁴ As suggested earlier, such rules and conditions, while exclusionary at times, at the pre-production stage remain flexible strategies that guide and enable the creative agency of specific potential participants while also constraining that of others, thus further embodying the more flexible media apparatus of control becoming dominant within Web 2.0 platforms and the twenty first century, user-driven online ecosystem shaped by communicative capitalism more generally. While many of these countries' governments blocked access to YouTube at the time of the project, a few critics like Negar Esfandiary have still opposed these rules' exclusion of residents from Burma or Iran - as running counter to the project's supposed image of inclusiveness.⁹²⁵ With regard to the type of participants who participated and were included in the project, MacDonald himself has acknowledged the dominance of American content within the entries due to Americans being very used to owning cameras and experienced with the Web and filmmaking.⁹²⁶ When questioned about the number of countries represented in the film at Sundance, he was unaware of how many are actually included, solidifying the project's lack of concern for its utopian promise to include media creators from all over the world.⁹²⁷ In addition, of the twenty six winning contributors whose content received the most screen time in the film, many of them are from developed North American and European countries like Spain with seven contributors being from the U.S. alone and participant Harvey Glen being a British filmmaker living in the United Arab Emirates.⁹²⁸

⁹²³"Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹²⁴"FAQs," *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>

⁹²⁵"Burmese miss out on Youtube "life in a day" contest due to US sanctions," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, 04 Aug 2010; Negar Esfandiary, "YouTube should let Iranians speak," *The Guardian*, August 16th, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/16/youtube-iran-ban-life-in-day>

⁹²⁶ See Robert Goldrich, "Directors: Kevin MacDonald," *Shoot*, 51.8. (Oct. 15th, 2010): 20, 28, EBSCOHost.

⁹²⁷"The Life in a Day World Premiere at Sundance: Q & A," YouTube video, 42: 03, posted by "Life in a Day," March 24th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2IhIK5GV-g>

⁹²⁸Wendy Mitchell, "26 YouTube Contributors heading to Sundance for Life in a Day Premiere," *Screen Daily*, January 6th, 2011, <http://www.screendaily.com/festivals/sundance/26-youtube-contributors-heading-to-sundance-for->

Likewise, a significant amount of the film's clips, especially the more extensive sequences from the winners, are dominated by English-language speakers. This lack of balance was even noted by *Variety* critic Robert Koehler who correctly asserts that “the Western world is considerably on greater view in this assemblage than contributions from Latin America, Asia and Africa” and speculates that this could be the result of “the quality of clips supplied, the filmmakers’ cultural choices and biases, or a combination of these.”⁹²⁹ This greater inclusion and representation of Western participants in the film supports Brabham's claim that, contrary to the belief in the diversity of the crowd found within discourse about crowdsourcing, the participants included within a project's crowd can often be “relatively homogeneous and elite in their makeup” and capable of reproducing “the hegemonic values of those in power through creative production.”⁹³⁰ While not as homogeneous or elite as Brabham's hypothetical situation, the included contributions and participants within *Life in a Day* do overrepresent the West and undercut the non-hierarchical, inclusive, and meritocratic fantasy of global unity and democratized media participation that is central to the more celebratory incarnations of crowdsourcing commentary as well as YouTube's crowdsourced documentary project itself.

Forms of Participatory Exclusion within *Life in a Day*

Besides these limitations when it comes to the type of participants who can contribute to the project, be included within it, and have the opportunity to receive rewards, other flexible strategies of control adopted by organizers like MacDonald at the stage of pre-production within its seemingly open-ended guidelines and open call may have also restricted some participants from being included in *Life in a Day* and placed certain indirect constraints on others. For instance, in the project's FAQ and other instructional video content, McDonald, Walker, and other organizers repeatedly encourage and guide participants to provide and preserve high quality footage – preferably 1080p at 24 frames per second – as well as sound recordings of similarly good quality, particularly if they want their footage to be chosen for the film and meet its intended cinematic standards.⁹³¹ While it did not function as a requirement or a directive, this

life-in-a-day-premiere/5022001.article; “Experience Sundance: Meet the Filmmakers # 1,” YouTube video, 2:21, posted by “Life in a Day,” Jan. 25th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCDj3NEUI8k>

⁹²⁹Robert Koehler, “Review: ‘Life in a Day,’” *Variety*, January 28th, 2011, <http://variety.com/2011/film/reviews/life-in-a-day-1117944405/>

⁹³⁰Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 97.

⁹³¹ See “FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; Kevin MacDonald, “An Update from Kevin MacDonald,” YouTube video, 1:25, Oct. 25th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0diP6B0P14&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw&index=51; Kevin

strong and more indirect suggestion within the project's surrounding material held the potential to exclude the contributions of less wealthy or technically skilled members of the online crowd from the final film because they may not possess, nor be able to afford the equipment or training that would allow them to better meet this standard of quality. While the final product does contain a mixture of high and low quality footage captured with a variety of devices, *Life in a Day* does privilege footage that possesses a higher resolution and more professional aesthetics while often according this content a lot of screen-time. Furthermore, despite project's narrative of empowerment directed at YouTube's amateur user, many of the contributors who won a trip to Sundance like Harvey Glen, Cristina Bocchialini, Soma Helmi, and Ayman El Gazwy were already experienced in the field of media production and professionally involved in the industry, thus making them more likely to have access to the technology and filmmaking skills that would help them meet the above quality criteria.⁹³² The filmmakers at the Sundance premiere's Q & A session even confirmed that the final film's footage was submitted by both amateur and professional creators.⁹³³ This reality bolsters another critical claim by Brabham, which rejects the aforementioned belief within crowdsourcing discourse by Howe and others that the 'crowd' included in a project is primarily composed of empowered amateurs rather than professionals.⁹³⁴ In actuality, the flexible strategic suggestion mentioned above, which appears designed to elevate the film's visual quality to better serve YouTube's promotional aims, ultimately constructs a participatory environment that is more inviting to middle-class and established media creators and more likely to include their contributions. Besides possibly excluding some of the project's less wealthy amateur participants, this state of affairs also undermines the amateur-professional dichotomy often constructed within discourse about crowdsourcing, which places professionals squarely on the side of the project organizers and characterizes them as managers engaging in the supposedly necessary task of controlling a crowd assumed to be populated by amateurs.

MacDonald, "Kevin MacDonald – Save Your Originals," YouTube video, 0:40, posted by "Life in a Day," Jul. 30th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzUd4xRK0bg&index=53&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw; Joe Walker, "The Film Editor's How-to-guide for Life in a Day," YouTube video, 1:48, July 22nd, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nIIVH0R0kY>

⁹³²For examples, see "Experience Sundance: Meet the Filmmakers # 1," YouTube video, 2:21, posted by "Life in a Day," Jan. 25th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCDj3NEUI8k>; "Experience Sundance: Meet the Filmmakers # 2," YouTube video, 2:10, posted by "Life in a Day," Jan. 25th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNqYl4mzIG0>

⁹³³"The Life in a Day World Premiere at Sundance: Q & A," YouTube video, 42: 03, posted by "Life in a Day," March 24th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2IhIK5GV-g>

⁹³⁴Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 69, 73.

Life in a Day's Organizers, their Control, and its Denial and Legitimation

However, avoiding crowdsourcing discourse's tendency to focus solely on the composition of the harnessed crowd and, in the process, displace attention from the makeup of a crowdsourcing project's organizers, the relative homogeneity of the artists and entities who initiated *Life in a Day* and, as will be illustrated later, predominantly controlled its final form must also be foregrounded when being critical of the empowerment narrative surrounding it. For example, being a capitalistic product of globalization, the initial organizers behind *Life in a Day* are part of their own global network and include corporate and cultural entities and actors from South Korea, the U.S., and Britain, such as LG Electronics, Google, and the mostly British crew of filmmakers and assistants employed by production company Scott Free Productions. Although the presence of a South Korean multinational subsidiary of a larger conglomerate partially lends a global character to this grouping of corporate actors and professional artists, the composition of *Life in a Day's* project organizers remains more geographically, culturally, and economically homogeneous and less inclusive than that of its participants. Moreover, by including corporations like Google or LG, they also hold significantly more economic and institutional power than the contributors to the project. When recognizing the greater homogeneity, power, and predominantly Western origins of *Life in a Day's* organizers along with their relationship with profit-driven Web 2.0 platforms and new media technologies, one can better understand the dominance of Western content within the final film, the exclusion of potential participants from sanctioned countries with a contentious relationship with the U.S., and its crowdsourcing campaign's emphasis on the connection and empowerment enabled by digital technology and the Web. Furthermore, the presence of corporations driving *Life in a Day* among its organizers also explains its use of crowdsourcing to harness the low-cost labour of participants in order to create and exploit the resulting film for promotional and commercial ends.

Aside from these obstacles to the project's narrative of inclusivity and participant empowerment, the limited form of creative participation afforded in the *Life in a Day* project also undermines the promise of a more collaborative alternative to the past hierarchical relations of production between creators in the media industry and citizens as well as between company owners and artists. Participation within *Life in a Day* entailed adherence to the parameters set by its initiating organizers and was directly shaped by what Gaudenzi and Dovey previously viewed as the strategies and frames adopted by the former. Offering only a limited form of creative

participation within the executory mode outlined by Literat, *Life in a Day's* chosen strategies do not produce a truly collaborative relationship, nor do they afford the co-authorship of its structural form to participants or the deeper participatory agency it entails. For instance, even though contributors were relatively free to choose the subject of their footage, MacDonald's video-based, open call, however, does request them to answer three questions and fulfill one request: 1) "What do you fear most in your life today"?; 2) "What do you love"?; 3) "What makes you laugh"?; and 4) a request for users to show what is in their pockets.⁹³⁵ MacDonald thus seemingly privileges submissions that execute these modular participatory tasks over more original material and requires their completion by, at least, a substantial enough number of participants. Other directives shaping the content of the submissions also came from Herbert, who, in a video, requested uploaded videos of recorded sounds including: 1) clapping; 2) a musical note being held for as long as possible; 3) the sound of breathing; 4) the sound of an individual sleeping; and 5) the sound of a person running.⁹³⁶ Likewise, in another video, Walker demanded that no submitted footage be edited, thus limiting the contributors from exerting any type of formal creativity when it came to their submissions.⁹³⁷ While contributors are not required to fulfill any of these directions, they were encouraged to do so if they wanted their footage to be included in the film and, overall, they did not have any real say with regard to the construction of the directives or the opportunity to collaboratively create their own with the project's leading creators. Ultimately, within the final film, many of the video contributions that answered these directives were included, often within montage sequences, thus confirming how these directives directly affected the way in which a user's participation manifested. Once again, like the conditions and rules constructed by the organizers at the outset of the project, these more indirect strategies to guide the creative autonomy of *Life in a Day's* harnessed crowd of participants, while not concrete requirements, further reflected the more flexible paradigm and apparatus of control that has emerged within this twenty first century media ecosystem and the neoliberal mode of communicative capitalism that informs it.

⁹³⁵Kevin MacDonald, "Kevin MacDonald on Life in a Day," Youtube video, 2:17, posted by "Life in a Day," July 1st, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_4uii96xqM&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4I2pAw

⁹³⁶"How You Can Build the Soundtrack to Life in a Day," YouTube video, 3:17, July 20th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46de7qPgcyg&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4I2pAw&index=57; Matthew Herbert, "New Request for Sounds from Matthew Herbert," YouTube video, 1:55, posted by "Life in a Day," Nov. 18th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTmwiUNmcGI&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4I2pAw&index=48

⁹³⁷"The Film Editor's How-to-guide for Life in a Day," YouTube video, 1:48, posted by "Life in a Day," July 22nd, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nIIVH0R0kY&index=56&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4I2pAw

Other restrictions on the content provided by participants are outlined within *Life in a Day's* official rules and terms and its FAQ, both of which modulate, rather than completely control or constrain, the creative agency of the crowd's members on YouTube by creating the parameters for their voluntary creative participation. These conditions again limit the participation of users and include restrictions against uploads promoting a political agenda as well as “offensive, inappropriate or illegal content, including profanity, pornographic or sexual content, content promoting alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, firearms or weapons.”⁹³⁸ Most of these restrictions are part of YouTube's community guidelines and, as constitutive rules setting the stage for *Life in a Day's* participatory activity, they are informed by the platform's situation within a contemporary information economy increasingly driven by advertiser-friendly amateur media content and the monetizable attention it can bring. This immediate context compels the ad-dependent platform to be a more advertiser friendly space and to extend the content restrictions of its platform to *Life in a Day's* participants, so that its submissions can be hosted on YouTube and they can draw more viewers to the platform that can potentially be commodified to sell ad space in the present or in the future. In addition, with these content rules in place, the resulting documentary will also be more palatable to a wider audience and its primary function as an inoffensive, positive, and profitable form of promotional content for YouTube will be satisfied. However, these constraints against material with a political agenda or sexual content limit the type of participation allowed and undercut the film's espoused goal of creating a representative portrait of the world. Furthermore, while participants retain ownership of their video submissions according to the rules and terms, they still have to forfeit their right to control its use in relation to *Life in a Day* and grant the organizers the right to exploit a user's submitted video and its content in all ancillary media in perpetuity.⁹³⁹ These strategic constraints on the form of participation that YouTube users can undertake and the degree of ownership that they hold over its product highlight the real control that *Life in a Day's* organizers — YouTube, LG Electronics, Scott Free Productions, MacDonald, etc. — possess over the conditions that ground the creativity of participants and determine who owns the right to control their product's use within the project. As already stated, the strategic decisions made at this pre-production phase in the form of the

⁹³⁸“Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹³⁹“FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; “Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

project's rules or its terms and conditions — even if they do not directly shape the output of participants and afford them a significant amount of creative autonomy and tactical agency with regard to what they submit — reveal the dominant amount of control and power that *Life in a Day's* initiating organizers, not its participants, possess over its over-arching strategic decisions, its foundational parameters, and its final form.

Reinforcing this reality, participants also have no real control over the review and selection process designed to filter the submissions for inclusion in the film. Due to their lack of control over the documentary's final form, their creative participation does not really evolve into a more significant collaborative relationship with *Life in a Day's* organizers that would accord these participants more authorial power over the structural elements of the project. Following Condry and Johnson's political conception of collaboration and its acknowledgment of the presence of agency amidst power differences within a collaborative relationship, it is *Life in a Day's* organizers, in their role as occupiers, who hold the most power within this partnership with participants and have the most control over the pre- and post-production phases of the crowdsourcing process and over who gets to benefit from the final result. For instance, as stated in its official rules and terms and FAQ, it is MacDonald and his editors who are strategically accorded with the exclusive authorial power to review, filter, and select the submitted material for inclusion within the linear version of the documentary project.⁹⁴⁰ Within *Film Comment*, Paul Brunick criticizes the project as a flawed piece of crowdsourced creation because it specifically failed to crowdsource this very filtering process.⁹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the team tasked with this role was composed of roughly 25 multilingual research assistants and students employed by Scott's LA production company and from London film schools, who: 1) catalogued thousands of hours of submissions according to countries, themes, and video quality; 2) translated their content; and 3) evaluated them using a star-based rating system from 1 to 5.⁹⁴² Walker and MacDonald then reviewed the 4 and 5 star rated submissions and cut this sample of submissions into the final

⁹⁴⁰“FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>; “Life in a Day’ Film: Official Rules and Terms,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹⁴¹Paul Brunick, “Crowd-Sourcing Creation,” *Film Comment* 47.4. (Jul. 2011): 45, ProQuest.

⁹⁴²Rachel Dodes, “FRIDAY JOURNAL --- The Arena -- Documentary: 'Life in a Day': Patching YouTube Clips into a Movie Quilt,” *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition, 22 July 2011, D.4; Giles Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” *Sunday Times*, July 25th, 2010, 16; Angela Watercutter, “Life in a Day Distills 4, 500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary,” *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>

film.⁹⁴³ Although Walker claimed that the selection process was shaped by a desire for strong stories and characters that resonated and for elements that one would expect in a film,⁹⁴⁴ the evaluation criteria constructed by organizers for this filtering process was even provided to participants in the project's rules and terms and included: (i) the appropriateness of footage “in relation to the Director’s brief as explained on the Film Channel”; (ii) its “uniqueness”; (iii) its “creativity”; (iv) its “technical execution”; and (v) its “consistency with the creative and artistic vision of us and/or the Director of the Film.”⁹⁴⁵ Criteria like ‘uniqueness,’ ‘creativity,’ and ‘technical execution,’ however, could primarily benefit contributors with enough pre-existing knowledge of documentary conventions to distance their submissions from them or with already established media production skills, thus holding the potential to unintentionally exclude untrained amateur participants. In addition, as indicated in the rules and terms, the adherence of participants to the spirit of the project's description in the initial video “brief” and the directives contained within it was another factor that could lead to the exclusion or negative assessment of submissions. Furthermore, despite the project's fantastical narrative of inclusive participation, many contributions were excluded due to the limited space afforded by the linear format of a documentary, but also because they did not adequately satisfy the above criteria and “fit into the overall structure of the film”⁹⁴⁶ and its “overarching narrative.”⁹⁴⁷ When it came to *Life in a Day*'s intended structure and narrative, both of which informed the selection and evaluation process, these elements were solely decided by figures like MacDonald and Walker with no real input from participants.⁹⁴⁸ Although a certain amount of control is relinquished during the production phase of the project in keeping with the more flexible neoliberal paradigm of capitalistic organization and management emerging from the 1990s onwards, this strategic and centralized exertion of control during the post-production state by its organizers significantly complicates the image of collaborative authorship that *Life in a Day* seeks to construct for itself

⁹⁴³Adam Sternbergh, “Around the World in One Day,” *The New York Times*, July 22nd, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/magazine/around-the-world-in-one-day-on-youtube.html?_r=0

⁹⁴⁴Ibid.

⁹⁴⁵“‘Life in a Day’ Film: Official Rules and Terms,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹⁴⁶Kevin MacDonald, “Life in a Day is Picture Locked: A Message from Kevin MacDonald,” YouTube video, 1:10, posted by “Life in a Day,” Dec. 8th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MKxyFXljKY&index=44&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw

⁹⁴⁷“FAQs,” *Google*, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>;

⁹⁴⁸“‘Life in a Day: A New Type of Filmmaking,’” YouTube video, 2:54, posted by “Life in a Day,” Dec. 14th, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf1AI3_qX7c&index=43&list=UU70oKkuTAoL-_grDe4l2pAw

and foregrounds the unequal power relations that exist between participants and organizers when it comes to its final form. It also highlights how, despite the utopian rhetoric about disruptive transformation surrounding the practice of crowdsourcing, media crowdsourcing projects always exist in a relationship of continuity with the hierarchical and centralized relations of management and gatekeeping found between production and distribution companies, artists, and consumers within more traditional mass media industries.

Due to this unequal distribution of control, MacDonald still views the project as “my film,” even though included participants are credited as co-directors and he has stated that there is “not the same degree of ownership as with other work.”⁹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the reality of the project organizers' proprietary ownership over *Life in a Day* has to be repeatedly minimized and suppressed in order for its user-centric narrative of participatory and collaborative empowerment to persist and beneficially support YouTube's utopian brand image. Consequently, MacDonald has elsewhere presented himself as more of a co-author and claims that *Life in a Day* “feels simultaneously like my film and the film of all these people who contributed to it.”⁹⁵⁰ Moreover, in a *Wired* interview, MacDonald, however, emphasizes the influence of participants on the film's final form when he claims that its overall structure was guided by the submissions: “I let the material speak to me — I watched it (or rather the 300 hours of “best bits”) over two months and just let it tell me what the themes and structure should be.”⁹⁵¹ Echoing previous statements by Verhoeven and Jones in relation to their crowdsourced films, this assertion from MacDonald strategically masks and minimizes the complete control that he, along with his fellow artists and corporate partners like Google, hold over the film's final form. Although he regards himself as a co-author with participants, Walker, contrary to MacDonald's attribution of influence to the crowd, has stressed the need of professionals like a director to determine a work's structure.⁹⁵² Complementing the primacy that Walker accords to the film director, *Life in a Day's* video content, its rules and terms, its FAQ, and the various public interviews undertaken with

⁹⁴⁹Leigh Singer, “Join cinema's new in-crowd,” *The Independent*, October 26th, 2011,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/join-cinemas-new-in-crowd-2297390.html>

⁹⁵⁰Rachel Dodes, “‘Life in a Day’ Director Aims to Elevate YouTube Videos Into Art,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 22nd, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/07/22/life-in-a-day-director-kevin-macdonald-aims-to-elevate-youtube-videos-into-art/?mod=google_news_blog

⁹⁵¹Angela Watercutter, “Life in a Day Distills 4, 500 Hours of Intimate Video Into Urgent Documentary,” *Wired*, July 29th, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/2011/07/life-in-a-day-interviews/all/>

⁹⁵²Leigh Singer, “Join cinema's new in-crowd,” *The Independent*, October 26th, 2011,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/join-cinemas-new-in-crowd-2297390.html>

MacDonald all frame him as the central author presumably in order to benefit from the prestige associated with his past award-winning work. Reflecting this privileged position, he is even presented first and in isolation within the final documentary before the project's participants are co-credited. Moreover, as confirmed earlier, it is the organizers of the project — MacDonald, his team of fellow artists, and his corporate partners like YouTube and LG Electronics — who exclusively hold the authorial power over what participant submissions get included in the final work and over its ultimate form. Despite the promise of being credited as co-directors, YouTube even openly states in its rules and terms that, when it comes to what footage by participants is included, "Our decision and that of the Director is final," thus again placing MacDonald and the entities behind the project in a privileged position of power.⁹⁵³ In light of this tendency for key elements of crowdsourced documentary projects to be controlled by the select number of creators and entities who initiate them, Gaudenzi, in reference to *Life in a Day*, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing distributed production from distributed authorship, stating that, while "distributed production has its own economic, aesthetic, and ethical repercussions, [...] it does not touch upon the authorship of the interactive documentary."⁹⁵⁴ She also declares that, often in participatory media projects that claim to be collaborative, "the freedom of action given to the participant has normally impacted the production of the content itself, [...] but not its form," thus implicitly positioning the project organizer who does shape a work's form as its central author.⁹⁵⁵ In their own analysis of participatory productions like *Life in a Day*, Green and his fellow authors concluded that an "imbalanced power relationship" similar to the "filmmaker-victim paradigm" associated with the director-subject relations within ethnographic documentaries appears within crowdsourced films because user participation is only allowed in the production stage while the main project organizer — typically, a filmmaker who occupies the position of author — retains a considerable amount of control over participants within the "*pre-* and *post-production* stages."⁹⁵⁶ Supporting this conclusion, the crowdsourced participation of the crowd within the *Life in a Day* media project is ultimately limited to the production of footage and its members, rather than being more substantive collaborators, possess no real input with

⁹⁵³"FAQs," Google, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>;
"Life in a Day' Film: Official Rules and Terms," Google, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹⁵⁴Gaudenzi, "Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries," 136.

⁹⁵⁵Gaudenzi, "Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries," 144.

⁹⁵⁶Green et al., "Beyond Participatory Production: Digitally Supporting Grassroots Documentary," 3158.

regard to the project's open call, its directives, its selection or evaluation process, and its final form.

The power and control afforded to the figure framed as the author of *Life in a Day* and the complementary disempowerment of the crowd of participants are also reinforced through another discursive strategy of communicative capitalism that is common to rhetoric about crowd-driven Web 2.0 phenomena like crowdsourcing: the discursive framing of the harnessed crowd of participants as a diverse and chaotic group of amateurs in need of a professional form of control by its organizers. In a blog post on the topic of crowdsourcing, Jonathan Gray has even remarked upon this tendency to broadly use the crowd as a straw man “for rhetorical purposes, to reinstate the power of the individual creator, to argue for the lack of wisdom of the crowd and the need for benevolent dictators (!), and hence in some regards to circle the wagons around the author as God figure.”⁹⁵⁷ Recognizing the same power accorded by this type of framing to the artist who initiates a crowd-driven participatory project, Sarah Browne has similarly suggested that the mere naming and participation of a 'crowd' could “reinforce the singularity of the artist's identity.”⁹⁵⁸ A similar elevation and solidification of MacDonald as *Life in a Day's* central author and the key figure whose control over the crowdsourced film is necessary emerges as a result of the reproduction of the amateur-professional dichotomy within crowdsourcing discourse by commentators and the documentary project's organizers. For instance, in his 2010 article from the *Sunday Times*, Giles Hattersley replicates this characterization of crowd as being predominantly composed of amateurs when he posits that the organizers of *Life in a Day*, through the crowdsourcing process, are “using professional skills to oversee amateur content.”⁹⁵⁹ In this same 2010 article, MacDonald himself perpetuates this professional-amateur binary by foregrounding the “need for a professional eye, for somebody to structure something out of all this” when referring to the amateur content submitted by the online crowd to YouTube for *Life in a Day*.⁹⁶⁰ Despite the partial rehabilitation and celebration of the crowd within crowdsourcing discourse by authors like Surowiecki and Howe as a group formation composed of diverse and

⁹⁵⁷Jonathan Gray, “Crowds, Words, and the Futures of Entertainment Conference,” *Antenna*, November 15th, 2011, <http://blog.commart.wisc.edu/2011/11/15/crowds-words-and-the-futures-of-entertainment-conference/>

⁹⁵⁸Sarah Browne, “Crowd theory lite: 'the crowd' in participatory art and pop economics,” *Circa* 126 (Winter 2008): 38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25564974>.

⁹⁵⁹Giles Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” *Sunday Times*, July 25th, 2010, 16.

⁹⁶⁰Kevin MacDonald qtd. in Giles Hattersley, “Day in the Life of Planet Earth,” *Sunday Times*, July 25th, 2010, pg. 16.

intelligent individuals, the above implicit portrait of the output of a crowd of average citizens as disorganized and in need of structure and hierarchical control by the professional leaders or organizers of a crowdsourcing project — a recurring feature of discourse about crowdsourcing — is heavily indebted to the pre-existing historical tendency described by Schmidt and Barrows to represent the crowd as an embodiment of chaos, irrationality, and femininity dating back to the nineteenth century.⁹⁶¹ Although the initiating organizers behind *Life in a Day* rarely actually use the term 'crowd' to speak about the amateur participants who submit content to the project, they still implicitly associate them and their content with a similarly gendered sense of disorganization, inferiority, and chaos. In addition, re-instituting a hierarchical relation between professional leaders presumed to be male and a crowd of individuals similar to that encouraged within the past crowd theories of figures like Le Bon, MacDonald ultimately still positions himself as the professional male leader needed to structure the output of this feminized crowd of participants in order to move it into a more artistic and productive direction. Furthermore, a similarly gendered hierarchical dichotomy between professional organizers and participants is reinforced within the *Life in a Day* project through its FAQ and its rules and terms and the latter's use of words like 'director' and 'filmmaker' to describe the project's organizers while concepts like participant, user, or contributor are predominantly associated with the isolated members of the online crowd who submit content for the film.⁹⁶² These alternative terms effectively position participants not as co-creators with substantive authorial rights over the project, but as the mere supporters and passive users of an already established project or Web platform. This framing bolsters the power of the initiating artist, organizer, and platform owner by situating them as the central authors behind *Life in a Day*. Elsewhere, Johnson has contended that “discursively imagined audiences and the cultural hierarchies in which they are situated, grant meaning and value to the creative practice and identities of authors.”⁹⁶³ Although the online users who submitted content for *Life in a Day* are not an “audience,” their representations as amateurs,

⁹⁶¹Florian Alexander Schmidt, “For a Few Dollars More: Class Action Against Crowdsourcing,” *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on February 10th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014, <http://florianalexanderschmidt.de/for-a-few-dollars-more/>; Florian Alexander Schmidt, “For A Fistful of Dollars,” *Florianschmidt.co*, February 1st, 2013, <http://florianschmidt.co/for-a-fistful-of-dollars/>

⁹⁶²“FAQs,” Google, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/lifeinadayfaqs/>;
“Life in a Day’ Film: Official Rules and Terms,” Google, accessed November 21st, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/liadterms/>

⁹⁶³Derek Johnson, “Participation is Magic: Collaboration, Authorial Legitimacy, and the Audience Function,” in *A Companion to Authorship*, eds. Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 154.

contributors, and participants similarly shapes the authorial identity of the crowdsourcing film project's organizers and affords them the status and power that often comes with this cultivated identity. In addition, this particular characterization of participants, while further according a disproportionate amount of power to the organizers of a media crowdsourcing project like *Life in a Day*, simultaneously disempowers the contributors themselves. Brabham has, for instance, argued that, by implicitly or explicitly representing a crowdsourcing project's crowd is represented as being mostly composed of amateurs, its members are effectively disempowered and discursively denied the means to organize as professionals and demand certain rights.⁹⁶⁴ Ultimately, the *Life in a Day* project's discourse-based perpetuation and actual enactment of this hierarchical binary between its professional organizers who are framed as its lead authors and its participants who are predominantly coded as amateur participants reinforces and legitimates the disproportionate amount of authorial power afforded to its professional organizers over its amateur participants as a result of the specific architectural elements of the participatory Web 2.0 platform chosen — in this case, the uni-directional, user-centric, and fixed and pre-determined character of the uploading feature, interface, and channel accounts of YouTube — and of the particular strategies and conditions of participation chosen by the initiators of the project. This representation of *Life in a Day*'s tendency to implicitly frame professional organizers and participants in this manner relegates the latter — even if they actually contain professional media creators — to the disempowered position of amateur participant or contributor: two roles that are afforded no real ability to impact the project's final form or the structural conditions, strategies, and decisions flexibly shaping their participation and collaboration.

Life in a Day and the Question of Crowd Exploitation and Control

Due to the power imbalances that result from crowdsourced documentary projects like *Life in a Day* and its accompanying discourse, scholars like Dovey are ultimately right in perceiving them as exploiting the value produced by their user-participants.⁹⁶⁵ From a similar standpoint, Schmidt has asserted that “there will always be exploitation in crowdsourcing” because “the financial resources for payment are limited while the number of participants in the crowd is not,” thus benefiting the recipients of this labour more than the crowd.⁹⁶⁶ Kleemann,

⁹⁶⁴Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 87-88.

⁹⁶⁵Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” 17- 21, 24.

⁹⁶⁶Florian Alexander Schmidt, “The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly: Why Crowdsourcing Needs Ethics,” *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on October 8th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014,

Voss, and Rieder, for their part, conclude that crowdsourcing inherently relies on the “intentional mobilization for commercial exploitation of creative ideas and other forms of work performed by consumers.”⁹⁶⁷ This profit-driven value extraction process, in their view, entails the encouragement of users to work either for “free or for significantly less than that contribution is worth to the firm.”⁹⁶⁸ When supporting their own criticism of *Life in a Day* as being exploitative, Jon Dovey and William Moner have foregrounded — as has already been revealed in this chapter — how its participants do not receive any form of rights or compensation with regard to their footage's inclusion in the film and they only obtain a limited amount of exposure as a result of their participation.⁹⁶⁹ As already stated in the previous sections of this chapter, they also similarly underline how the majority of the commercial benefits and the increased brand and reputational value goes to project organizers like YouTube, Scott Free Productions, and LG Electronics.⁹⁷⁰ This list of beneficiaries would also include the film's international sales arm HanWay Films and its eventual distributor National Geographic Films.⁹⁷¹ Moreover, as already claimed earlier, *Life in a Day* also benefited YouTube specifically due to its novel creative use of crowdsourcing to 1) draw more users to the platform and increase its cultural capital, 2) enable its users to affectively engage and interact with it and the YouTube brand, and 3) embody the empowerment narrative that YouTube has associated with its brand identity. Despite the majority of benefits from *Life in a Day* being accrued by Google and its project partners, a full month after being released in theatres on July 29th, 2011, it was revealed in a *New York Times* piece about the rival crowdsourcing project *One Day on Earth* that the film had “taken in just \$207,324” at the box office to the slight disappointment of Daniel Battsek, the current president of National

<http://florianschmidt.co/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

⁹⁶⁷Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators: the commercial utilization of consumer work through crowd- sourcing,” 22.

⁹⁶⁸Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators: the commercial utilization of consumer work through crowd- sourcing,” 6.

⁹⁶⁹William Moner, “Undercompensated Labor in Life in a Day,” *Flow TV*, June 9th, 2011, <http://flowtv.org/2011/06/crowdsourced-labor-in-life-in-a-day/>; Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” 22.

⁹⁷⁰William Moner, “Undercompensated Labor in Life in a Day,” *Flow TV*, June 9th, 2011, <http://flowtv.org/2011/06/crowdsourced-labor-in-life-in-a-day/>; Dovey, “Documentary Ecosystems: Collaboration and Exploitation,” 22.

⁹⁷¹Wendy Mitchell, “HanWay Comes on Board for Kevin MacDonald's Life in a Day,” *Screen Daily*, October 26th, 2010, <http://www.screendaily.com/hanway-comes-on-board-for-kevin-macdonalds-life-in-a-day/5019766.article#>; Jay Hernandez and Daniel Miller, “National Geographic Films Pick up Life in a Day,” *Reuters*, January 24th, 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/24/us-lifeinaday-idUSTRE70N6D120110124>

Geographic Films at the time.⁹⁷² Its eventual release for free on the platform a few months later in October 2011 would also limit its profitability when it came to DVD sales.⁹⁷³ Thus, the resulting *Life in a Day* documentary itself was not very profitable, although the promotional value of the project for its other partners like YouTube and LG Electronics as well as for artists like MacDonald should not be discounted and can not be fully quantified. Moreover, despite being instrumental to the popularity and limited success of the *Life in a Day* format and to the testing of its achievability, its participants also do not get to benefit from its conversion into an iterative global franchise and licensed format for Scott Free Productions, which has profitably licensed the crowdsourcing concept to Fuji TV of Japan for *Japan in a Day* (2012), the BBC for *Britain in a Day* (2012), Indiana Production Company and RAI Cinema for *Italy in a Day* (2014) along with several other upcoming and now completed productions in Israel, Germany, and France.⁹⁷⁴ Recently in 2015, Google and filmmakers Ridley Scott, Anurag Kashyap, and Richie Mehta have started a similar crowdsourcing film project entitled *India in a Day* where YouTube users from India are encouraged to upload footage captured on October 10th, 2015.⁹⁷⁵ The only other benefit besides the limited exposure that the film's contributors could obtain was the interactive time capsule intended by the project to inclusively preserve all submissions and exist as a socially valuable archive for the world at large including participants. While present for a few years after film's release, this interactive gallery is no longer accessible as of 2017, thus eliminating the most inclusive and valuable incarnation of the project for the average participant and foregrounding the project's failure to live up to its promise of a comprehensive time-capsule akin to the Mass-Observation archives. By removing this feature, *Life in a Day's* organizers undermine the utopian narrative of inclusivity and democratization surrounding the project while is once again underlining how its participants are not considered equal collaborators with substantive authorial rights and input when it comes to elements relating to the final incarnations and structural feature of the project including features such as the interactive gallery. In

⁹⁷²Brooks Barnes, "One Day on Earth' Seeks to Capture the World," *The New York Times*, August 29th, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/30/movies/one-day-on-earth-seeks-to-capture-the-world.html>

⁹⁷³"Life in a Day Now Available on YouTube," *Google Blog*, October 31st, 2011, <https://googleblog.blogspot.ca/2011/10/life-in-day-now-available-on-youtube.html>

⁹⁷⁴Nick Vivarelli, "Israel, Germany, France Join Ridley Scott's 'Life in a Day' Format," *Variety*, September 2nd, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/israel-germany-france-join-ridley-scotts-life-in-a-day-format-exclusive-1201295900/>

⁹⁷⁵Nasman Ramachandran, "Google, Ridley Scott, Anurag Kashyap Team for 'India in a Day,'" *Variety*, October 1st, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/asia/google-ridley-scott-anurag-kashyap-team-for-india-in-a-day-1201606860/>

combination with their lack of compensation, the unequal relationship between *Life in a Day's* project organizers and its participants lends credence to the above criticism of exploitation.

However, although Moner and Dovey characterize *Life in a Day's* crowdsourced production process as exploitative, Brabham notes that crowds willingly enter into these relationships with project organizers and, without coercion, it is difficult to view them as exploitative in a traditional Marxist sense.⁹⁷⁶ Other celebratory proponents of crowd-driven production like Shirky dismiss similar exploitation critiques and defend this practice on the basis that the participation of a crowd of amateurs is never really motivated by money, but always voluntarily driven by more intrinsic motives.⁹⁷⁷ Partially complementing such perspectives, Banks and Humphreys in their work on social media platforms have resisted this same criticism of exploited user labour and emphasized the relationship of co-creation between users and commercial forces within social network markets.⁹⁷⁸ Like Brabham, David Hesmondhalgh has also openly criticized the above representation of user-generated content (UGC) as exploited labour due to the lack of coercion involved.⁹⁷⁹ However, with regard to descriptions of crowdsourcing, Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder have criticized the tendency to assume that participants who volunteer to be part of crowdsourcing projects must receive some form of benefit, otherwise they would not volunteer their labour.⁹⁸⁰ In their view, this “conclusion is axiomatic” because the “problematic possibility that firms may be able to manipulate individuals' cost-benefit calculations falls outside of the paradigm.”⁹⁸¹ According to them, it also ignores the “corporate consultants” who “openly discuss crowdsourcing as a model in which participating consumers get absolutely no benefit from their participation” as well as the reality of contributors who are under-compensated for their work.⁹⁸²

Although exploitation and its suggestion of coercion might not appear to be applicable to crowdsourcing, which requires some degree of agency from participants in order for them to independently complete tasks in a cost-effective manner, these alternative conceptions of Web

⁹⁷⁶Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 85, 88.

⁹⁷⁷Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, 57, 59-60, 82-84, 196.

⁹⁷⁸Banks and Humphreys, “The Labour of User Co-creators: Emergent Social Network Markets?,” 404-407, 412-414.

⁹⁷⁹Hesmondhalgh, “User-Generated Content, Free Labour, and the Culture Industries,” 273-276.

⁹⁸⁰Kleemann, Voss, and Rieder, “Un(der)paid innovators: the commercial utilization of consumer work through crowd-sourcing,” 10.

⁹⁸¹Ibid.

⁹⁸²Ibid.

2.0 practices and the labour involved, while resisting the recent political economy analysis of these subjects by theorists like Andrejevic, Fuchs, and Dean, often fall into a similar trap. Specifically, they fail to address, in an in-depth manner, the lingering power relations that exist inside the relationships between the organizers of crowdsourcing media projects and participants, nor the systems, social actors, and types of discourse to which they are connected. While Brabham is skeptical of using the term 'exploitation,' he is correct to believe that the narrative of amateur empowerment within crowdsourcing discourse masks the way in which the labour of participants upholds capitalist systems.⁹⁸³ Furthermore, he acknowledges how these participants, in their support of these systems, also do not really have the power to control and fully own the product that they create or even the means by which it is shaped and distributed, nor do they democratically create it with the project's organizers.⁹⁸⁴ Rather than exemplifying a clean break with the hierarchical forms of management and ownership found within the production and distribution processes of mass media industries, *Life in a Day's* entire production is still marked by unequal power relations, even if it takes the form of a more flexible and less restrictive relation of control between organizers and participants.

In addition, although *Life in a Day* frames its participants as creative partners, these hierarchical relations of power, their parallel presentation as mere contributors, and the characterization of these participating creators and their output as in need of professional control support Schmidt's contention that crowdsourcing often entails a form of closure that benefits someone outside the crowd and always constructs the latter as an other, never truly as a group of peers.⁹⁸⁵ Browne herself has remarked elsewhere that a "positive construction of the crowd" often describes it as "an intelligence that is best harnessed in order to produce capital: not for itself, but for another."⁹⁸⁶ Furthermore, in his analysis of the constantly shifting construction of the audience in the era of digital media, Jack Bratich emphasizes how the crowd, once viewed as unruly, disruptive, and self-governing if not contained by some external force, has come to be mobilized into a useful public comprised of disconnected individuals instrumentalized into

⁹⁸³Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 90-91.

⁹⁸⁴Brabham, *Crowdsourcing*, 90-91.

⁹⁸⁵Florian Alexander Schmidt, "For a Few Dollars More: Class Action Against Crowdsourcing," *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on February 10th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014, <http://florianalexanderschmidt.de/for-a-few-dollars-more/>; Florian Alexander Schmidt, "For A Fistful of Dollars," *Florianschmidt.co*, February 1st, 2013, <http://florianschmidt.co/for-a-fistful-of-dollars/>

⁹⁸⁶Browne, "Crowd theory lite: 'the crowd' in participatory art and pop economics," 38.

fulfilling a pre-determined task that benefits other social actors.⁹⁸⁷ Like Brabham, Bratich's argument positions the crowd as being channeled into a complicit relationship with a systemic structure that mostly benefits other social actors besides itself and thus situates its 'collective intelligence' in relation to "networked institutions of security and sovereignty, preempting the emergence of some user-generated usage while promoting others."⁹⁸⁸ However, he does not believe the neutralization and control of the crowd's more unruly potential into a public for constituted ends by these institutions is complete.⁹⁸⁹ Drawing on the autonomist Marxist work of Michael Hard and Antonio Negri on the multitude, he recognizes the residual constituent and compositional power that media subjects, which can embody the repressed unruliness of the crowd or lead to an alternative, open-ended, and less neutralizing form of organization.⁹⁹⁰ Interestingly, the interventions of Brabham and Bratich echo Johnson's revised image of collaboration between corporations and consumers within media franchises in terms of complicity in that they recognize either the crowd's lingering agency within these types of relationships or even the possibility of an alternative and organized collective subject whose actions somehow resist constituted forms of power.

Johnson's re-evaluation of the supposedly collaborative relationships found within the media industry provides a useful corrective for the deterministic excesses of political economy, critical theory, and more orthodox forms of Marxist cultural theory as well as the fan and digital media studies that began to exaggerate the capacity of citizens engaging within the realm of cultural production to resist hegemonic power structures. Like Brabham in relation to crowdsourcing, Johnson acknowledges how the collaborations witnessed within the field of media franchises have "generated meaningful and playful experiences of autonomy, freedom, and difference while also supporting established structures of power."⁹⁹¹ Recognizing the presence of agency in these relationships, Johnson's approach to their analysis attempts to "square theories of socially networked cultural collaboration with autonomist criticisms of free labor and neoliberalism, particularly those drawn from video game studies that theorize political

⁹⁸⁷Jack Bratich, "From Audiences to Media Subjectivities: Mutants in the Interregnum," in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies*, First edition, ed. Angharad N. Valdivias (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 21-22, 25-26.

⁹⁸⁸Bratich, "From Audiences to Media Subjectivities: Mutants in the Interregnum," 22.

⁹⁸⁹Bratich, "From Audiences to Media Subjectivities: Mutants in the Interregnum," 25-26.

⁹⁹⁰Bratich, "From Audiences to Media Subjectivities: Mutants in the Interregnum," 25-26.

⁹⁹¹Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 201.

interchanges between play and industrial work and conceive interactivity and participation as a means through which power and dominance can operate.”⁹⁹² Moreover, he also acknowledges how the active participation of users or consumers within franchise relations and the gamification of labour often involved both encourage “consumers to adopt pleasurable subjectivities of play that obscure the economics and power relations underpinning that collaboration” and to “pleasurably identify with their status as laborers and consent to corporate authority in a hegemonic context of play.”⁹⁹³ For this reason, he argues that it is necessary for “the labor of play and the labor of producing play [...] to be conceptualized in terms of a subjective consent to and meaningful participation in industrial hegemonies.”⁹⁹⁴ Despite this image of wilful complicity, Johnson also foregrounds the possibility for “end user consumers and other participants in the networked relations of production” to “bend and shape the reproduction of culture in heterogeneous ways in spite of the corporatized control of cultural resources.”⁹⁹⁵ Johnson's intervention offers a useful foundation to explain the unique hierarchical relationships, power differences, and agency often encountered within crowdsourced film projects like *Life in a Day*. Specifically, his conception of enfranchisement is akin to the experience of participants to *Life in a Day* who, while having a degree of agency over the production of media content, willingly enter into an unequal power relationship with their organizers, most of which are wealthy corporate entities or professional artists representing their interests. These organizers, however, still do not manage all of the creative tasks that need to be undertaken by participants in the same direct manner that a studio owner or producer could affect a more traditional film production with a larger budget and its artists due to the increased scope of a global media crowdsourcing project and its comparatively lower risk and cost. Nevertheless, they retain the power to set all of the conditions and parameters for the creative agency of participants and hold complete control over the pre- and post-production decisions that flexibly shape the production of this cheap user-generated media content and directly structure it according to their interests. Further echoing Johnson's work, the voluntary contribution of participants within *Life in a Day* supports the commercial media corporations that initiated it and the dominant capitalistic systems to which they are connected.

⁹⁹²Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 200.

⁹⁹³Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 229-30.

⁹⁹⁴Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 229.

⁹⁹⁵Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative Licensing and Collaboration in the Cultural Industries*, 231.

Complementing Johnson's foregrounding of the complicity of contributors' playful and participatory labour with hegemonic power structures within the media industry and the inequality they cultivate, scholar Ayhan Aytes has remarked upon what she views as the global, neoliberal, and industrial dimension of crowdsourcing arrangements as well as the online crowds that drive this new form of outsourcing.⁹⁹⁶ More importantly, she argues that crowdsourcing “negates the essentialist distinction between the industrial and postindustrial configuration of labor” and that, while its crowds “are subjected to a form of division of labor that is reminiscent of industrial production,” this division and the affected workers are related to more “global neoliberal socioeconomic formations,” which extend to the Global South.⁹⁹⁷ Moreover, Aytes views crowdsourcing as an exploitative “apparatus of a neoliberal system of exception that signifies a novel instance of labor arbitrage, where online cognitive labor markets are established as aggregation platforms that simultaneously act as a techno-immigration system.”⁹⁹⁸ This system, according to her, includes and appropriates the labour of workers from the Global South, but ultimately undervalues it and often spatially alienates them from its products.⁹⁹⁹ Similarly, *Life in a Day's* recruited participants from more remote regions in the world are also alienated from the product of their contributed labour and receive no substantial compensation in exchange for it. Following this contextualization of crowdsourcing within the wider inequities produced by globalization, Aytes further argues that, because of the fragmentation of work into modular tasks and its production of exploitable labour-power, the crowdsourced workers, who choose to fulfill the tasks of a platform like Mechanical Turk, are each “disciplined” and rendered productive in service of neoliberal capital.¹⁰⁰⁰ In contrast to this association of crowdsourcing with a more traditional form of industrial exploitation and discipline, Daniel Trottier has emphasized the decentralized and uncontrollable dimension of the crowdsourced crowd and refers to the Deleuzian work of Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker on the flexible modulation of the crowd via a protocol-based form of control within digitally networked spaces.¹⁰⁰¹ By recognizing the above dimension and drawing on the theoretical work of Galloway and Thacker, he is able to

⁹⁹⁶Ayhan Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 88-89.

⁹⁹⁷Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” 90.

⁹⁹⁸Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” 91.

⁹⁹⁹Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” 93.

¹⁰⁰⁰Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” 90, 93-94.

¹⁰⁰¹Daniel Trottier, “Crowdsourcing CCTV surveillance on the Internet,” *Information, Communication, and Society*, 17.5. (May 2014): 612.

acknowledges the presence of power within crowdsourcing relationships and highlight the crowd's persistent agency.¹⁰⁰² In the case of *Life in a Day*, the hierarchical relationship between project organizers and participants seemingly parallels Bratich and Aytes' shared narrative of a pacified and neutralized crowd and its disciplined members. However, rather than exemplifying an uncanny reproduction of an industrial form of management and Foucauldian discipline, Aytes is right to see the hierarchical form of management associated with crowdsourcing as complicating a binary between “industrial and postindustrial configuration of labor,” although her vision of the crowd's members being disciplined to fulfill specific tasks may not be as fully applicable to *Life in a Day* and its more open-ended call for participation in the more rigid manner initially conceived by Foucault.¹⁰⁰³ Even though modular tasks are suggested to *Life in a Day's* participants and the rules of the project and the YouTube platform are set and enforced by its organizers, contributors are not restrictively disciplined or managed into a fixed identity or mode of behaviour by these suggestions or conditions, nor could they be. Instead, while discourse surrounding the project and the YouTube platform as well as their constitutive rules and affordances do discipline and channel contributors towards participatory subject positions that are imbued a sense of empowerment, the exact meaning and character of the individualist neoliberal subjectivity, which is encouraged by the project organizers, is deliberately left to the subjective imagination of the participating users. In short, even as they are disciplined into this more autonomous and hybrid neoliberal subjectivity through the narrative of artistic and amateur empowerment found within the more idealistic discourse about media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day*, these participants retain a greater degree of the creative agency and autonomy acknowledged within Brabham and Trottier's conceptions of the crowd functioning within a crowdsourcing project. Moreover, even when the previously mentioned constraints on participation, requests, and parameters imposed by the strategies of *Life in a Day's* organizers are acknowledged, the overall task of capturing documentary footage from July 24th remains rather open and participants are given considerable flexibility when it comes to the media content they produce. For this reason, although *Life in a Day* does echo the hierarchies present between media companies, artists, and consumers within past industrial forms of media management and collaboration, its flexible management of the crowd is more akin to Deleuze's society of control

¹⁰⁰²Trottier, “Crowdsourcing CCTV surveillance on the Internet,” 612.

¹⁰⁰³Aytes, “Return of the Crowds: Mechanical Turk and Neoliberal States of Exception,” 90.

or Jarrett's neoliberal conception of governmentality within a Web 2.0 environment and its disciplining of individuals into less fixed and supposedly empowered creative subjects — an alternative perspective previously described in the introduction. Thus, the network of stakeholders who initiate crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* do flexibly guide and modulate the creative agency of the crowd's contributors primarily by controlling and setting the platform, rules, and parameters for their participation — effectively, the structuring elements that provide the foundation for the crowdsourcing process — rather than restrictively managing their productivity more directly and disciplining them into more fixed and less flexible subject positions. More importantly, the risk averse organizers of *Life in a Day* must adopt this more flexible approach in order to better incentivize participants to freely produce the large number of modular media segments necessary for the documentary and in order to profitably extract a considerable amount of value from the low-cost productivity of these contributors.

Due to the relative autonomy of crowdsourcing participants within the limitations imposed by *Life in a Day* and its chosen platform and their willing acceptance of its terms, Brabham is not entirely wrong to be reluctant in embracing Marxist political economy's term 'exploitation' and its strong suggestion of coercion or ignorance. The participants who volunteer their labour for crowdsourcing projects are not completely deprived of agency or unaware of their limited position. Many of the contributors to *Life in a Day*, within the open-ended limits set forth by the project, were still free to produce a wide range of content on July 24th for their own subjective reasons. A significant portion of participants did not even create media in response to the more explicit directives of the open call. For instance, certain contributors personally viewed their participation as a positive and rewarding experience that gave them an opportunity to be a media creator as revealed by the Ukrainian location manager Boris Grishkevich at the Sundance premiere.¹⁰⁰⁴ Conversely, with Bob and Catherine Liginiski, capturing footage for the project as a family helped them cope as they struggled with her breast cancer treatment.¹⁰⁰⁵ One of the participants, David Jacques, even viewed the project as an opportunity to have a public platform

¹⁰⁰⁴ “The Life in a Day World Premiere at Sundance: Q & A.” YouTube video, 42: 03. Posted by “Life in a Day,” March 24th, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2IhIK5GV-g>

¹⁰⁰⁵For examples, see Cathy Liginiski, “My Cancer Story, A Red Carpet And the Lessons Learned,” *Women You Should Know*, September 15th, 2014, <http://www.womenyoushouldknow.net/my-cancer-story-a-red-carpet-and-the-lessons-learned/>; “The Life in a Day World Premiere at Sundance: Q & A,” YouTube video, 42: 03, posted by “Life in a Day,” March 24th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2IhIK5GV-g>

for a message of LGBT acceptance.¹⁰⁰⁶ Conversely, filmmaker Soma Helmi chose to participate in *Life in a Day* in order to further immerse herself in the filmmaking industry and open up new opportunities for her in the process.¹⁰⁰⁷ Slovakian filmmaker Marek Mackovic stands to benefit the most from his tactical participation in the project, eventually using the vast amount of exposure surrounding *Life in a Day* as a platform to promote *Okwhan's Mission Impossible*, his full-length 2016 documentary feature on Korean cyclist Okwhan Yoon — his chosen subject for his video submission to MacDonald's film.¹⁰⁰⁸ Nevertheless, despite this always present agency, *Life in a Day's* participants including its winners — by not being afforded a form of compensation that matched the value of their contributions to the project, any substantial input within it when it came to its final form and structuring conditions, or control over how their work is used within it — do experience a form of loss, alienation, and unequal exchange, which, as already remarked in the chapter on gameplay commentary, shares certain qualities with the notion of exploitation.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* do not ever repress or fully contain the unruly, creative agency of a networked crowd of users. Conversely, *Life in a Day* actively encouraged their personal and affective desire to be creatively fulfilled and be part of something larger through its neoliberal narrative of individual artistic empowerment and its self-representation as a global community-driven project with a substantial social purpose. Consequently, the choice of the YouTube platform with its open architecture and this discourse, which emerged from *Life in a Day's* paratextual content and surrounding commentary, encouraged the creative agency of online participants, so that it could be more easily controlled and channeled towards beneficial, capitalistic ends like promotion and profit. Contrary to the utopian rhetoric of disruptive transformation found within crowdsourcing discourse, the flexible apparatus of discursive and non-discursive control strategies and decisions adopted and required by the *Life in a Day* project and other similar incarnations of the global documentary mosaic genre of media crowdsourcing still perpetuates a hierarchical mode of media production

¹⁰⁰⁶“Experience Sundance: Meet the Filmmakers # 10,” YouTube video, 2:07, posted by “Life in a Day,” Jan. 28th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thEFpQr2SU0>

¹⁰⁰⁷“Experience Sundance: Meet the Filmmakers # 4,” YouTube video, 2:34, posted by “Life in a Day,” Jan. 25th, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF8VPP4uBqI>

¹⁰⁰⁸Leo Barraclough, “Life in a Day's Okhwan Yoon to Star in Feature Documentary,” *Variety*, May 13th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/cannes-life-in-a-days-okhwan-yoon-to-star-in-feature-docu-1201179172/>

management and unequal power relations between its initiating organizers and owners and the contributing online users who willingly participate and collaborate within it. Consequently, such media crowdsourcing projects are another embodiment of the increasingly flexible mode of control privileged within the twenty first century's user-driven online media ecosystem and the paradigm of communicative capitalism that informs it.

Chapter Six: The Channeling of Fan Affect and Labour within the Crowdsourced Remake Genre through the Lens of the *Star Wars Uncut* Project

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the 'global documentary mosaic' mode of media crowdsourcing embodied by *Life in a Day* — contrary to the utopian rhetoric and fantasy of global inclusivity and unity surrounding it — tends to cultivate asymmetrical power relations between project organizers and participants and exclude certain types of contributors as a result of the unique constraints and the specific apparatus of control strategies that often accompany it and are required to flexibly shape the participation and collaboration of these participants into an necessary direction. While combined with more direct and centralized forms of management and gatekeeping during the post-production phase when the user-generated content crowdsourced by this genre needs to be filtered and converted into a more linear format, these strategies of control — as extensions of a larger apparatus that sustains a communicative paradigm of neoliberal capitalism — frequently take the form of: an affectively attractive discourse of amateur empowerment designed to attract passionate participants to contribute media content to the project; an open-ended call inviting users to participate in this manner that still affords them a considerable amount of creative autonomy and tactical agency; a relatively inclusive Web 2.0 platform like YouTube with the architectural features necessary to facilitate this user participation; and formal rules, conditions, and guidelines at the pre-production stage which indirectly influence the eventual expression of the tapped crowd's creative agency. More specifically, the asymmetrical power relations and the forms of inequality and exclusion resulting from this apparatus of strategies are also reinforced by the genre's inherent need for the organizers of a project to decide what contributions are eventually included within its dominant form as an original, static, and linear documentary film. However, building on this previous analysis of the key example of the global documentary mosaic genre, *Life in a Day*, this chapter will illustrate how, even if slightly different, the strategies intended to enable and flexibly control the participation and collaboration of networked users — which are found within the contemporaneous "crowdsourced remake" genre of media crowdsourcing — also frequently result in a power imbalance and various types of inequality involving the initiating organizers of a project, the latter's participants, and the copyright owners of the appropriated media property to be remade. In contrast to more original crowdsourced works like *50 Kisses*, *Iron Sky*, and *Life in a Day*, however, the organizers of crowdsourced remakes must adhere, to a greater degree, to the

original structure and narrative of the appropriated cultural property rather than fully discover or construct an original media text out of the disparate contributions of participants. As will be later foregrounded in this chapter, this difference has the potential to render the crowdsourced remake a much more transparent mode of media crowdsourcing in that, from the outset, contributors have a more concrete understanding of the final form of any project within this genre and how their contributions will fit into it if included. Having original and fixed media objects to provide a foundation and being tethered to them, crowdsourced remakes of these media texts take on a more performative dimension for their participants that still affords them a considerable amount of creative agency. Due to their performative character, they also enable new and seemingly more substantive types of user-driven participation and collaboration due to these remakes' occasionally dynamic and procedural reproductions of the original text using a different array of submitted clips transformatively reproducing many of their narrative moments — a diversity of performative reproductions that is afforded by these texts' relatively static character and which can include a wider variety of user contributions. Despite these seeming gestures towards greater inclusivity and participatory empowerment, this chapter will demonstrate how the copyright status of the work appropriated for a crowdsourced remake — particularly, when combined with a variety of strategies intended to channel the pre-existing affect of online fans for this work in order to stimulate participation within the project and then to flexibly control the media content resulting from this productive and affect-driven immaterial labour — can often produce constraints and asymmetrical relations of power relations that are similar to those seen within YouTube's *Life in a Day*. In this chapter, the crowdsourced *Star Wars Uncut* project, a crowd-driven work that remade the original *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) and *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* (1980) with the help of user contributions, will be analyzed in terms of the power relations that were formed, throughout the two phases of the project, between its lead organizers like director Casey Pugh, its participants, and, eventually, the present copyright holders of the franchise, LucasFilm and Disney. Through this examination, as with YouTube's *Life in a Day* project, these unequal power relations will be similarly shown to be the product of an array of discursive and non-discursive strategies intended to flexibly control the productive participatory and collaborative labour of online users, strategies that are increasingly becoming a core part of the apparatus supporting our twenty first century networked media ecosystem and the communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism to which it is intrinsically connected. More

specifically, in the context of various crowdsourced remakes like the *Star Wars Uncut* project, the specific strategies of flexible control making up this media apparatus will be revealed within this chapter's analysis to be the result of a variety of socio-economic and cultural factors including current copyright law in the U.S. and the capitalistic goals and interests of copyright owners and, in some cases, of crowdsourcing project organizers — especially the desire to accumulate and draw more attention towards oneself or to the specific media commodity that is being recreated and the commercial franchise of which it is a part. Seeking to shape the type of participation and collaboration afforded by the crowdsourcing-driven remake project, such strategies are often similar to the choices made by *Life in a Day*'s organizers to elicit and flexibly channel the participation and, by extension, the productive immaterial labour of networked users. They frequently consist of: the appropriation of a particular media hosting platform like Vimeo whose interface or API can allow participating users to submit media content to the project; the choice of architectural and interface features for the Web platform around which the crowdsourced remake will be constructed and which will incentivize online users to more easily participate; and the specific terms, decisions, and policy choices that determine the structure and intended final form of the crowdsourced remake project and, as a result, set limits on the participation and collaboration the latter affords to contributors. However, reflecting the increasing intersection of affect and discourse within the new apparatus of flexible control strategies increasingly found within our twenty first century networked media ecosystem driven by user-generated content, this chapter's critical analysis of the *Star Wars Uncut* project will, unlike the previous examination of *Life in a Day*, reveal another key affective-discursive strategy adopted by the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects to encourage potential participants into freely offering their labour. Specifically, it will demonstrate how the *Star Wars Uncut* project chose to remake popular media objects like *Star Wars: A New Hope* or *Empire Strikes Back* and, along with its Web platform, engage in discourse and image-based iconography referring to the narrative content of *Star Wars* franchise, so as to evoke positive affective responses from their passionate online fans that would make them more inclined to undertake this labour and produce the media segments required by the crowdsourcing-driven remakes of these two films. Lastly, through this critical analysis of the two incarnations of *Star Wars Uncut*, this chapter will unveil its transition from a more independent and fan-driven enterprise driven by Pugh during the crowdsourced remake of *A New Hope* to the crowdsourced remake of *Empire*

Strikes Back whose uncompensated immaterial and affect-driven labour from users and its products was increasingly being integrated within the promotional and profit-driven strategies of Lucasfilm and flexibly controlled in service of its capitalistic interests.

The Rise of the Crowdsourced Remake

However, before this analysis, it is necessary to trace the origins of this new fan-driven mode of crowdsourced media production — the crowdsourced remake — prior to the emergence of the crowdsourced *Star Wars Uncut* project beginning in 2009. Because, as the previous chapter demonstrated, occasional slippage persisted within commentary on web-enabled media productions between related terms like open source, commons-based peer production, and crowdsourcing, which often shared a few common features., crowdsourcing itself was often reductively associated to the open source and free software movements. While the practices described by terms like "open source" were significantly different, these two movements were a key influence on the emergence of the crowdsourced remake. For instance, as detailed by Gaudenzi, Canadian filmmaker Brett Gaylor inspired by the open source movement would create a public beta of the platform Open Source Cinema in 2004 and relaunch it in 2007 in order to encourage “people to participate in making his feature documentary *RIP: A Remix Manifesto*” (2008), submit their own user-generated remixes, and appropriate and alter the platform's content itself.¹⁰⁰⁹ Gaudenzi herself goes on to compare these strategies to crowdsourcing, but acknowledges that Gaylor, after failing to properly compel amateurs to participate, began to source content from professionals “within a selected crowd of enthusiastic re-mixers,” an intervention that deviates from the openness typically associated with crowdsourcing.¹⁰¹⁰ More interestingly, as with the global documentary mosaic genre of media crowdsourcing, she claims that “Gaylor's attempt to introduce participative logic in his documentary is limited by the final form of the documentary itself: a linear film, which needs to respect the rules of narrative coherence.”¹⁰¹¹ Through this process, the film's participants could never “own the form,” whose coherence had to be shaped by Gaylor, a reality that prefigured the similar lack of control over form within MacDonald's *Life in a Day* project.¹⁰¹² Nevertheless, as if to provide a corrective for this effect, Gaylor also encouraged the participants on the Open Source Cinema platform to

¹⁰⁰⁹Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” 133.

¹⁰¹⁰Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” 133.

¹⁰¹¹Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” 133.

¹⁰¹²Gaudenzi, “Strategies of Participation: The Who, What and When of Collaborative Documentaries,” 133.

remix content from the existing 2008 film as well as contribute and add more of their original user-generated content, so that a 2.0. version of the film and other incarnations could be produced and, occasionally, screened, thus giving them more control over the final version of the film project.¹⁰¹³ Intersecting with remix culture, this open source mode of film production thus introduced the idea of allowing online participants, through a Creative Commons license, to appropriate the elements of a pre-existing work and then alter them in order to perpetually create original cultural products.

An older and more explicit example of this association of crowdsourcing and its features with the open source movement can be found in the 2006 crowd-driven reproduction of Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) entitled *Re_Potemkin*. This work was part of the .freeP_ experimental project series and its creators even described it as a “copyleft crowdsourcing free/open source cinema project,” adopting the term 'crowdsourcing' a few months after Howe coined and popularized it in June 2006.¹⁰¹⁴ More specifically, *Re_Potemkin* remade *Battleship Potemkin*, a film in the public domain, within Istanbul, Turkey with the help of 105 students of the “basic design course at yildiz technical university, faculty of art and design” divided into 15 groups during the months of December 2006 and January 2007.¹⁰¹⁵ The remake closely followed the shots and segments of the original film with each student group of 15 reproducing their assigned segment of shots. However, not every shot of the 75 minute feature film is reproduced and, in one incarnation of the project where the original film is visually juxtaposed with a version of *Re_Potemkin* using a split screen, certain shots and scenes, which often included some of the more complex and difficult to reproduce ones featuring ships at sea, are missing and these gaps appear as a succession of empty black frames. Guided by a call to reproduce the film within this academic context and the distributed creativity of a significantly less open crowd of students at a smaller scale, the project creators describe *Re_Potemkin* on their website as “one of the very first art projects that uses the term crowdsourcing and also one of the

¹⁰¹³“Brett Gaylor's Open Source Cinema: A Revolution in the Making,” *Power to the Pixel*, accessed June 25th, 2015, <http://www.powertothepixel.com/brett-gaylors-open-source-cinema-a-revolution-in-the-making/>; Eric Kohn, “Fanning the Fear of Zombies, Pursuing User-Generated Storylines via the Internet,” *Indiewire*, October 16th, 2008, http://www.indiewire.com/article/fanning_the_fear_of_zombies_pursuing_user-generated_storylines_via_the_inte; King, *Indie 2.0: Change and Continuity in Contemporary American Indie Film*, 98.

¹⁰¹⁴“re_potemkin: a copyleft crowdsourcing free/open source cinema project,” *Re-potemkin*, last modified on May 20th, 2011, accessed June 30th, 2015, <http://re-potemkin.httpdot.net>

¹⁰¹⁵Ibid.

first examples of using the idea of crowdsourcing to make a film.”¹⁰¹⁶ However, they also retreat from this association due to the increasing perception of the concept by corporations as a profitable means of "getting the work done," now preferring the term "peer production" for its greater suggestion of an "another world" and alternative possibilities "in the age of information technologies."¹⁰¹⁷ The project's use of a rather closed community without networked connectivity, a distinguishing characteristic of crowdsourcing, is another reason to regard *Re_Potemkin* as distinct from the crowdsourced remaking that will be the focus of this chapter's case study analysis of *Star Wars Uncut*. Despite this distinction, *Re_Potemkin* prefigured the crowdsourced remake through its formal division of Eisenstein's film into modular, component pieces intended to be reproduced, but also through its encouragement of online users to participate in the process of media transformation by enabling them to copy, share, and modify the resulting content for personal and even commercial uses through the adoption of a non-proprietary copyleft notice. Although most crowdsourced projects invite online participation from the outset and rarely by adhering to the ethics of the open source and free software movements like *Re_Potemkin*, the open invitation of a participatory crowd, offline and online, in combination with the segmentization of media object foreshadowed the common form of the crowdsourced remake.

Similarly, conceived in 2006, New York-based, video artist Perry Bard would undertake a participatory artistic experiment involving appropriation entitled *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake* (2007) whose use of networked communication as a platform and whose global aspirations would render the 'crowdsourced remake' genre more expansive and hence closer to the open call usually associated with crowdsourcing. In this case, another Russian film from the 1920s is appropriated to be collectively remade, now by an open-ended and networked crowd: Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929). As a project that was initially funded as part of the BBC Bigger Screen Initiative, the work is described on its website as:

.... a participatory video shot by people around the world who are invited to record images interpreting the original script of Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* and upload them to this site. Software developed specifically for this project archives, sequences and streams the submissions as a film. Anyone can upload footage. When the work streams

¹⁰¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁷Ibid.

your contribution becomes part of a worldwide montage, in Vertov's terms the "decoding of life as it is".¹⁰¹⁸

Using the upload function found on the web platform, participants are invited in an open call to reinterpret the original shots of Vertov's film and "upload your footage to this site to become part of the database," but are offered no clear guidelines on how to reinterpret the original footage.¹⁰¹⁹ Like the 'global mosaic' mode of crowdsourced filmmaking, the project's open call promises to enable an online crowd of participants to contribute and collectively take part in a truly inclusive and global work. In order to better meet this global ideal, Bard was compelled to recruit foreign correspondents in a few more remote countries and encourage them to submit their own footage for some of the shots, although this outreach was very limited and many of the project's participants still predominantly originate from developed Western countries as with *Life in a Day*.¹⁰²⁰ Furthermore, a lot of participants were often university students already connected to the realm of film and media production or its academic study and, as a result, were already aware of the original Vertov film, a text more widely known in these cultural spaces.¹⁰²¹ By choosing a film object that is less popular, but well known to these participants who hold a greater a knowledge of film production techniques, aesthetics, and history, Bard could more easily channel the cinephilic love of certain film students for Vertov's film and their various forms of expertise in service of her project. Moreover, she could then convert the potential of this affect and knowledge into productive forms of labour and use it to stimulate the beneficial participation of film savvy contributors who would be more likely to understand and fulfill the performative re-interpretations of Vertov's original film and its themes required and intended by the project. Thus, while reflecting the manipulation of affect present within later incarnations of the crowdsourced remake and their use of more globally popular texts that extend beyond the realm of academia, media production, and artistic spaces, the choice of the film object to be remade within this genre of crowdsourced media production reveals itself to be a crucial element when it

¹⁰¹⁸"Man with a Movie Camera: Introduction," *Dziga.perrybard.net*, accessed February 20th, 2015, <http://dziga.perrybard.net> [site discontinued]

¹⁰¹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰²⁰Perry Bard, "Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo," Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by "Visual & Critical Studies," September 29th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

¹⁰²¹Parry Bard, "Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo," Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by "Visual & Critical Studies," September 29th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

comes to the gathering of an expansive online crowd passionate enough to freely contribute their labour to a project.

In addition, within this early incarnation of the crowdsourced remake, some of the later obstacles to a greater form of participatory inclusion seen within the *Star Wars Uncut* project would reveal themselves. For instance, in spite of her stated desire to “make this project global” and her interest in “cultural diversity” within this crowdsourced remake, Bard is open about the limitations of the online crowd and, throughout the production of *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake*, encountered several issues related to language and access.¹⁰²² Ultimately, because her project was marked by a similar digital divide encountered within *Life in a Day*, she concludes that we are “a long way from having a 'Worldwide Network.' It exists out there but it’s still a utopia.”¹⁰²³ The limitations of the participating crowd are even apparent when screening the film. As with *Re_Potemkin*, the remake, when streamed at the time of this chapter's publication, possesses several moments where the original Vertov footage situated on the left of the screen is juxtaposed with a black second screen on the right, signaling that no participant has yet to upload footage for this segment of the film. According to Seth Feldman, a reason for these gaps could “just be audience attention span,” noting that Bard herself has drawn attention to the fact that, in terms of participant uploads, “the beginning of the film filled up faster than the end.”¹⁰²⁴ Even in 2016, eight years after its premiere in October 2007, the project's web platform details several instances of shots from the original film, including the most formally complex segments, with no corresponding uploads from participants. These blank spaces undercut the utopian rhetoric surrounding crowdsourcing and function as a visual reminder of the practice's inherent limitations if a crowd is not large or engaged enough to accomplish all the tasks necessary to complete a crowdsourced remake or if the film object, like a more niche art film such as Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, is not popular or engaging enough to inspire this large crowd of potential participants to devote their labour and time to such a project.

Despite this failing, *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake's* process for including participant videos is considerably more dynamic than *Re_Potemkin* and most other

¹⁰²²Stavros Alifragkis, “Power Structures and Digital Media: 2008 Man with the Movie Camera The Global Remake: interview with Perry Bard,” *Scroope: Cambridge Architecture Journal* no. 19 (June 2009): 159.

¹⁰²³Ibid.

¹⁰²⁴Seth Feldman, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a constructivist: Perry Bard’s *The Man With the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/FeldmanVertov/index.html>

crowdsourced films like *Life in a Day* in that a new version of the work is procedurally created daily by the web platform's software code programmed by Bard's collaborator John Weir. This procedural dimension is the direct result of the project's relatively fixed form resulting from its intention to remake Vertov's original film and loosely adhere to its structural organization of shots. Specifically, in Bard's project, Vertov's original film is divided into 57 scenes, which are further deconstructed into 1, 276 shots.¹⁰²⁵ Potential participants are invited to film one or multiple reconstructions of individual shots or even entire scenes from the original film represented by image thumbnails on the web platform provided by Bard. Afterwards, they are asked to upload their produced segments onto the same platform. When the platform's software randomly chooses submitted shots within the database in order to produce and stream the dynamic final result for the day, it is represented as a split screen with the left side containing the original Vertov film and the right side holding the uploaded footage of participants. The constantly changing content included within this format as a result of this process offers a more inclusive alternative to the linear, static products that often result from media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day*. Using this approach, the footage of participants appeared to be almost guaranteed to eventually be included someday within a procedurally created performance of the crowdsourced work, thus seemingly lending greater credence to the rhetoric of inclusivity often present within discourse about media crowdsourcing projects.

More importantly, Bard herself would reinforce this perception of the artistic project as being conceived as a means to include a more expansive form of participation from other people through the seemingly novel online practice of crowdsourcing and relinquish a greater degree of authorial control over its final form. For instance, in a lecture at the School of Visual Arts in New York, she would claim that the project was developed from an earlier work in 1999 called *Pulse* that reconstructed six minutes of Vertov's film with Bulgarian artist Boyan Dobrev and was significantly informed by the relatively new concept of crowdsourcing:

When I launched “Man with the Movie Camera and this is the url for the project, I was really thinking about crowdsourcing, that is, getting other people to think for me [...] Because I had already done my version, I decided that with Man with the Movie Camera, I was absolutely not going to upload anything. I was going to let everybody else do the uploading.”¹⁰²⁶

¹⁰²⁵Seth Feldman, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a constructivist: Perry Bard’s *The Man With the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/FeldmanVertov/index.html>

¹⁰²⁶Perry Bard, “Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo,” Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by “Visual &

Consequently, as indicated by this statement, crowdsourcing was, from the outset, an explicit influence on the project's distributed production process and, like the organizers of *Life in a Day*, Bard's statement once again minimizes the amount of control that she exerted over the project. Strong emphasis is implicitly placed on the procedural production of the work via the supposedly neutral functioning of code, a process that seemingly prevents the initiating artist, Bard, from holding the exclusive power to include and exclude contributions and thus appears to take these decisions out of her hands. Complementing this narrative, Feldman's analysis of the film stresses that "Bard refrains from exercising any curatorial power over whether a given uploaded shot is appropriate, or whether it is placed correctly or not next to Vertov's original."¹⁰²⁷ Likewise, scholar Tom Tenney similarly frames the project as "a work where the concept of the author is not only thrown into question, but must be applied to hundreds of artists simultaneously" and where "no artistic vision is at play."¹⁰²⁸ The resulting creation, in his estimation, "oscillates between a collaboratively created *work* and an algorithmic *process*" and exemplifies a mode of remix where the artist assumes "the role of programmer" and where "computer processes" step "into the role of author."¹⁰²⁹ Echoing this perspective, another academic, Jaimie Baron, has claimed that, through this dynamic crowdsourcing process, the "intentions of the "crowd" are thus—at least partially—subsumed not to Bard's intentions but to the website's own intentionality (even if the website was Bard's idea)."¹⁰³⁰ This discourse of shared or displaced authorship is even further articulated by Bard herself within her descriptions of how the crowdsourcing process eventually compelled her to relinquish considerable control over the project in order to allow more people to participate on their own individual terms and enable it to avoid being an "exact remake."¹⁰³¹ Despite these numerous claims about displaced authorship

Critical Studies," September 29th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

¹⁰²⁷Seth Feldman, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a constructivist: Perry Bard's *The Man With the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/FeldmanVertov/index.html>

¹⁰²⁸Tom Tenney, "Crises of Meaning in Communities of Creative Appropriation: A Case Study of the 2010 RE/Mixed Media Festival," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, eds. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 418.

¹⁰²⁹Tenney, "Crises of Meaning in Communities of Creative Appropriation: A Case Study of the 2010 RE/Mixed Media Festival," 418.

¹⁰³⁰Jaimie Baron, "The Experimental Film Remake and the Digital Archive Effect: A Movie by Jen Procter and Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake," *Framework* 53, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 484, JSTOR.

¹⁰³¹Alifragkis, "Power Structures and Digital Media: 2008 Man with the Movie Camera The Global Remake: interview with Perry Bard," 157.

and minimal control, Bard herself has admitted to excluding some content from the database deemed too trivial or detached from the goals of the project and, often, curating her own versions of the remake for screenings.¹⁰³² Likewise, after a conversation with a participant who wished to be credited more overtly within the film's presentation at the Transmediale festival in Berlin in 2009, she also claimed to have removed his contribution and, after re-informing him of how credit for project participation would be presented on the site, offered to re-upload it if he still wanted to participate.¹⁰³³ Thus, despite the seemingly automatic organization of the submissions into a film stream, a degree of authorial control remained and, of course, was always present given that Bard herself had shaped the terms of participation in the project, its overall form, and its procedural character. Moreover, she also revealed that, when conceived, the project's web platform would have an interactive component that enabled its users to choose their own shots and organize their own versions of the crowdsourced remake, but this more interactive and open-ended format was eventually dropped from the planned platform in favour of her preferred conception of the project as a more limited participatory remake of the Vertov film.¹⁰³⁴ Consequently, she was adamant about “retaining a linear structure” and “adhering to the movie” throughout the project rather than allowing the database's participants to “grab shots from wherever and reorder the film.”¹⁰³⁵ Through its dynamic and non-linear production process that automatically includes all submissions in some form, *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake*, to a degree, seems to fulfill its promise to participants that they will be part of a unique project and credited on its web platform. However, at the time of writing, the Web platform that once hosted *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake* has stopped being maintained and is now inactive and inaccessible, thus causing its collection of uploaded recreated scenes to vanish, eliminating the greater inclusivity of its procedural media player, and reinforcing the disproportionate amount of control retained over the project and its online life by Bard and her fellow organizers.

¹⁰³²Perry Bard, “Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo,” Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by “Visual & Critical Studies,” <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

¹⁰³³ Perry Bard, “Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo,” Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by “Visual & Critical Studies,” September 29th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

¹⁰³⁴ Perry Bard, “Perry Bard: Video in the Age of YouTube on Vimeo,” Vimeo video, 1:29:03, posted by “Visual & Critical Studies,” September 29th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/29794973>

¹⁰³⁵Alifragkis, “Power Structures and Digital Media: 2008 Man with the Movie Camera The Global Remake: interview with Perry Bard,” 158.

Nevertheless, as will be encountered again in this chapter's analysis of *Star Wars Uncut*, the championing of this procedural format idealizes software code and platforms as neutral entities capable of filtering content without any bias while implicitly minimizing the power relations that are constructed as a result of the decisions of project organizers like Bard when it comes to the conception of the project's form, the terms of participation and credit, and the participatory architecture of the online media platform adopted. For these reasons, as with *Life in a Day*, contributors to the project are not substantive collaborators sharing authorial control with Bard, but, instead, more limited participants and collaborators within a work whose form is already pre-determined. They do not share the power to affect the final form of Bard's participatory work, an affordance that typically comes with the distributed co-authorship present within a truly collaborative creative relationship and suggested in the previous chapter by Gaudenzi. Moreover, of all participants, Bard, as the initiator and director of the project, remains the creator who gains the most cultural capital and exposure from its existence. As illustrated by Feldman's framing of the film as "Perry Bard's *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake*" within the title of his film analysis or its dominant association with Bard herself within a festival exhibition context and art-focused literature, the artist who is most privileged as this crowdsourced work's primary author remains Bard.¹⁰³⁶

Case Study Analysis: *Star Wars Uncut* Project (2010-2014)

Following the emergence of Bard's incomplete and flawed crowdsourced remake in 2007 and its reliance on the passion of cinephiles and filmmakers, Casey Pugh, while working as a web developer for the online media platform Vimeo, also claims to have been "interested in crowdsourcing and getting many people to work on a common task for free, leveraging their passion."¹⁰³⁷ According to the website for the *Star Wars Uncut* project, he eventually decided in 2009 to "use the Internet and an ever-ready pool of passionate Star Wars fans to crowdsource the classic film *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*."¹⁰³⁸ Paralleling the rhetoric of the *Life in a Day* project designed to attract user participation, throughout *Star Wars Uncut*'s crowdsourcing campaign, Pugh would repeatedly stress the novelty and 'experimental' nature of this particular creative

¹⁰³⁶Seth Feldman, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a constructivist: Perry Bard's *The Man With the Movie Camera: The Global Remake*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 52 (Summer 2010), <http://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/FeldmanVertov/index.html>

¹⁰³⁷Casey Pugh, "Casey Pugh – Videos and the Internet." YouTube Video, 4:29, posted by "altparty," Oct. 25th, 2010. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3V4y6gtm97I>

¹⁰³⁸"About," *Star Wars Uncut*, accessed Oct. 22nd, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/about>

application of crowdsourcing. For example, in a blog post functioning as the project's open call, he promised 473 potential contributors a “chance to participate in an awesome video experiment.”¹⁰³⁹ Despite this representation of *Star Wars Uncut* as a novel experiment, Pugh would claim that this specific incarnation of his idea was influenced by an earlier use of crowdsourced labor to gather visual data in the hope of facilitating the transformation of an existing cultural product: Eyebeam's open source 'White Glove Tracking' project initiated by Evan Roth and Ben Engebretth.¹⁰⁴⁰ This project enlisted the aid of the online crowd in May 2007 to “isolate Michael Jackson's white glove in all 10,060 frames of his nationally televised landmark performance of Billy Jean.”¹⁰⁴¹ In its own description, a connection to crowdsourcing was made:

“W.G.T., much like Nasa's Clickworks project, is an exercise in crowd sourcing. Interested users can donate small bits of time by analyzing single frames within a much larger video (in this case the first televised performance of the Moonwalk). This enables the production of information that otherwise would be prohibitively labor intensive.”¹⁰⁴²

After crowdsourcing the archiving of this data with the help of a web platform that provided frames where the glove needed to be isolated and an interactive interface with which to accomplish this task, participants were credited on the platform's top contributors page and users were able to download the data source in order to produce their own remakes of the original performance with various forms of alterations applied to the isolated glove image. Unlike other crowdsourced media projects reliant on the completion of modular tasks like *Re_Potemkin* or *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake*, Michael Jackson's white glove was isolated by participants within all 10,060 frames of the performance and all tasks for the White Glove Tracking project were thus completed. A key element that secured this project's success was the widespread popularity of pop music icon Michael Jackson and the affective attachment that many online users all over the world had for the star and his music. The affective relationship of fans with a globally renowned musician whose work was much more widely known than

¹⁰³⁹Casey Pugh, “Have You Ever Wanted to be in a Star Wars Film?,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 7th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/137499722/have-you-ever-wanted-to-be-in-a-star-wars-film>

¹⁰⁴⁰Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, accessed June 22nd, 2015, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹⁰⁴¹“White Glove Tracking: Creating a Data Source Together One Glove at a Time,” *White Glove Tracking*, accessed June 27th, 2015, <http://www.whiteglovetracking.com>

¹⁰⁴²“About,” *White Glove Tracking*, accessed June 27th, 2015, <http://www.whiteglovetracking.com/about.html>

Eisenstein and Vertov's films thus served as a strong motivator grounding their participation. This resource could then be channeled and encouraged by the project organizers in order to spread information about the project and recruit enough engaged contributors to fulfill their goal. Roth himself would state that one of his primary motivations for choosing the Michael Jackson video performance “was to actively look for content that would lend itself to going viral.”¹⁰⁴³ However, although crowdsourcing was an inspiration for the project, Tom Finkelpearl is quick to note how its open source roots, like *Re_Potemkin*, differentiates it from other more simple and task-oriented crowdsourcing projects in that it “allowed for creative input by artists at the end of the day” when the aggregated data was made accessible to contributors for later use after the initial sourcing phase.¹⁰⁴⁴ Even *Life in a Day* only enabled participants to be creative during the initial production phase and did not eventually make the sourced material accessible for later appropriation via download to all contributors as an open source and common resource as with the White Glove Tracking project. Yet, despite this distinction, Roth and Engebret's experiment, while repeatedly framed as collaborative in an interview with Finkelpearl, once again did not really afford participants the ability to change the structure of the overall project.¹⁰⁴⁵

Influenced by the lessons and flaws of the White Glove Tracking project, Pugh set about adopting crowdsourcing and its ability to distribute the networked production of modular tasks in 2009, so he could produce a fan-driven remake of *Star Wars: A New Hope*. To accomplish this reproduction and enable online users to participate in the completion of tasks using a crowdsourcing platform, he wrote a program designed to automatically segment the original film into 473, 15-second scenes that would then have to be remade by contributors.¹⁰⁴⁶ Like Roth, he strategically chose a highly popular and deeply loved text like *Star Wars: A New Hope* to be the media object to be reproduced and transformed through crowdsourcing due to the “global

¹⁰⁴³Evan Roth, “*White Glove Tracking*: interview, Evan Roth, artist,” interview by Tom Finkelpearl, in *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, ed. Tom Finkelpearl (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 319.

¹⁰⁴⁴Tom Finkelpearl, “*White Glove Tracking*: interview, Evan Roth, artist,” interview by Tom Finkelpearl, in *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*, ed. Tom Finkelpearl (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 325.

¹⁰⁴⁵Roth, “*White Glove Tracking*: interview, Evan Roth, artist,” interview by Tom Finkelpearl, 315, 331.

¹⁰⁴⁶Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

appeal” of the film and the widespread knowledge of it that exists all over the world.¹⁰⁴⁷ Partially adding credence to Pugh's assertion, he has stated that, at the end of the project, scenes were submitted from 36 countries.¹⁰⁴⁸ The expansive and international appeal of the film was thus required by Pugh, so he could “take advantage of a pre-existing community” that was large enough and which would allow “*Uncut* to actually work.”¹⁰⁴⁹ The affect-driven labour that this large community of *Star Wars* fans regularly undertakes when creating fan productions was evidently viewed by Pugh as a resource that could be harnessed via crowdsourcing. As a re-occurring strategy within our twenty first century online media ecosystem designed to cut through the noise and draw the attention of connected users to a given platform or enterprise, the choice of the first film in the *Star Wars* trilogy was thus a strategic one designed to evoke, channel, and convert the pre-existing affect of fans into the productive form of immaterial and affect-driven labour necessary for the remake's completion, but also for spreading further awareness and passion about it online.

To channel this affect-driven labour and its productivity, he constructed an online media platform in 2009 that enabled all participating fans to claim 15-second scenes from *Star Wars: A New Hope* and upload their video reconstructions using Vimeo as a hosting service. Moreover, unlike *Re_Potemkin* and the White Glove Tracking project, Pugh's *Star Wars Uncut* project was not as explicitly grounded in an open-source ethos, nor merely seeking to create a data source constructed from a copyrighted musical performance. Instead, it appropriated the entirety of a popular copyrighted film that is not in the public domain and sought to create a transformative remake. Because the distribution rights to *Star Wars: A New Hope* are commercially owned by Twenty First Century Fox and Disney is now the rights holder to the franchise itself, certain potential constraints and obstacles, which were absent in crowdsourcing campaigns to remake a public domain film, were now present within the *Star Wars Uncut* project. In contrast, Mike Schneider's contemporaneous 2009 crowdsourced animated remake of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated*, also relied on the popularity of its chosen media object, but also its unique status as a public domain film, so that its creators

¹⁰⁴⁷Liz Shannon Miller, “As Star Wars: Uncut Nears Completion, What Does the Future Hold?,” *Gigaom*, January 15th, 2010, <https://gigaom.com/2010/01/15/as-star-wars-uncut-nears-completion-what-does-the-future-hold/>

¹⁰⁴⁸Casey Pugh, “Interview: Casey Pugh, 'Star Wars Uncut',” Interview by Daniel Rubinton, *Film Society Lincoln Center*, November 27th, 2012, <http://www.filmlinc.com/daily/entry/interview-with-casey-pugh-star-wars-uncut>

¹⁰⁴⁹Ibid.

could position it as a copyleft production, tie it to a Creative Commons license, and avoid the restrictions and the network of interested corporate actors that would come with creating a reproduction of a copyrighted work. This choice of a public domain film in combination with the relatively preplanned structure of the crowdsourced remake would allow Schneider to more easily frame his project as a collaborative remake that is not beholden to content owners and whose structure can better include the creative participation of the crowd, whether in terms of its form or its content. For instance, despite being the organizer of the crowdsourced remake *Night of the Living Dead Reanimated*, Schneider, like Bard, underplayed the amount of control he held over the project and, framing the work as collaborative, stressed how, due to the fixed “structure” already offered by the original Romero film, there was no need for a director and participants could more openly communicate with each other and collectively determine what scenes they would choose and how they would create them.¹⁰⁵⁰

Star Wars Uncut and the Narrative of Empowerment

In spite of its connection to a more commercial network of corporate actors, *Star Wars Uncut* project echoed this type of framing and, like other crowdsourced projects including *Life in a Day*, it was characterized by its organizers and other commentators as a work that would creatively empower a community of *Star Wars* fans and amateur fan creators more so than Pugh himself. Although the concept of crowdsourcing is often evoked by Pugh when talking about the project and by other commentators, occasionally, he would distance himself from the commercial connotations of the term and emphasize the communal dimension of the adopted sourcing process: “I like to say that it's no longer crowdsourcing, it's community-sourcing ... I found a very powerful community that wanted to work on something together.”¹⁰⁵¹ Similarly denying the appearance of a commercial motive following Lucasfilm's eventual tacit support of project, Pugh would even assert that “Lucasfilm isn't out to make money on this, and neither am I.”¹⁰⁵² More explicitly, he would profess that *Star Wars Uncut* “has always been an art project built by one person, rather than a commercial project,” claiming that it was its status as a non-commercial fan

¹⁰⁵⁰Mike Schneider, Keith Crocker, and Corpse S. Chris, “Making Of Commentary with Mike Schneider, Filmmaker Keith Crocker, and Corpse S. Chris,” *Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated*, DVD. Directed by Mike Schneider et al. New York: Wild Eye Releasing, 2010.

¹⁰⁵¹“Web 2.0. Expo NY 2011, Casey Pugh, VHX.tv, 'Star Wars Uncut: Crowdsourcing the Force,’” YouTube Video, 10:36, posted by “O'reilly,” October 14th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlxvzt7rKU4>

¹⁰⁵²Brian Stelter, “An Emmy for Rebuilding a Galaxy,” *New York Times*, August 27th, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/28/arts/television/28uncut.html?_r=0

project and experiment that initially endeared it to LucasFilm.¹⁰⁵³ Reinforcing *Star Wars Uncut's* cultivated image as a novel project driven by an online and global community of *Star Wars* fans rather than a profit-driven one, even the "About" page for the updated 2010 version of its web platform characterizes the enterprise as a means "to explore the dynamics of community on the web,"¹⁰⁵⁴ However, at the top of the *Star Wars Uncut's* website's home page in 2009, a tab did exist for interested participants to donate to Pugh in order to help him meet the costs associated with the platform and the non-profit project.¹⁰⁵⁵ Furthermore, due to a nondisclosure agreement that Pugh signed with LucasFilm during a meeting with the company early within the course of the project, the exact reasoning behind LucasFilm's support or the terms of any possible agreement with Pugh is unknown, thus underlining the manner in which a participating crowd can often be denied transparency and information about the intended goals of a crowdsourcing project for all actors involved, whether commercial or not.¹⁰⁵⁶ Despite this lack of full transparency, even in commentary by writers like *Gigaom's* Liz Shannon Miller, *Star Wars Uncut* is actively represented as an artistic and "nonprofit one" rather than a commercial or promotional work.¹⁰⁵⁷ Jenkins, Ford, and Green would even reinforce this public image of *Star Wars Uncut* and state that its primary intention is to "produce noncommercial fan films whose pleasure primarily comes the experimentation with dispersed creative processes."¹⁰⁵⁸ Complementing this emphasis on the artistic motivations for the project, Pugh has even asserted that he "cared more about it being transformative" and creative for fans than a promotional and derivative product for the *Star Wars* franchise.¹⁰⁵⁹ Due to this particular representation of the project, scholar Martin Butler has optimistically argued that:

Star Wars Uncut, then, turns out to be something like the aesthetic and ideological counterpart to the well-designed interface of interaction provided by Lucasfilm. The

¹⁰⁵³Casey Pugh, "Tribeca: Interview with Star Wars Uncut Creator Casey Pugh," *Filmoria*, Interview by Lesley Coffin, April 18th, 2013, <http://www.filmoria.co.uk/2013/04/tribeca-interview-with-star-wars-uncut-creator-casey-pugh/>

¹⁰⁵⁴"About," *StarWarsUncut.com*, June 7th, 2010, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100607083108/http://www.starwarsuncut.com:80/about>

¹⁰⁵⁵"Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, November 3rd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091103040245/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/>

¹⁰⁵⁶Brian Stelter, "An Emmy for Rebuilding a Galaxy," *New York Times*, August 27th, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/28/arts/television/28uncut.html?_r=0

¹⁰⁵⁷Liz Shannon Miller, "As Star Wars: Uncut Nears Completion, What Does the Future Hold?," *Gigaom*, January 15th, 2010, <https://gigaom.com/2010/01/15/as-star-wars-uncut-nears-completion-what-does-the-future-hold/>

¹⁰⁵⁸Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, 250.

¹⁰⁵⁹KC Ifeanyi, "Behind the Ultimate Crowdsourced Film--'Star Wars Uncut.," *FastCoCreate*, January 26th, 2012, <http://www.fastcocreate.com/1679460/behind-the-ultimate-crowdsourced-film-star-wars-uncut>

remake and its production platform seem to incorporate everything that the official website is not able to offer: it presents and represents a particularly unspoiled grassroots creativity and promotes a 'do-it-yourself ethics' expressed both through an aesthetics of amateurism and the 'not-for-profit agenda posted on the project's website.'¹⁰⁶⁰

In his view, *Star Wars Uncut* reflects an empowering form of “strategic amateurism” that is combined with the expertise of a “tactical media practitioner” like Pugh who knows “how and when to use it for a particular effect,” an effect that Butler inherently characterizes as politically subversive.¹⁰⁶¹ More specifically, however, he regards this strategic deployment of amateur creativity within the *Star Wars Uncut* project as an empowering tactic because “the act of *remaking Star Wars* online eventually turns out to be an act of *reclaiming* at the same time, an act of letting those that made it popular in the first place participate in its very creation.”¹⁰⁶² This Web 2.0 -influenced and affectively charged narrative of creative empowerment and opportunity for amateurs, which was cultivated by the project and this surrounding rhetoric, functioned as a supplementary means for Pugh and his fellow organizers to elicit online fans of *Star Wars* to contribute the vast amount of participatory labour required by the project.

Reinforcing this argument about the participatory empowerment afforded to fans within crowdsourced remakes is the wide range of additional enthusiastic commentary surrounding the *Star Wars Uncut* project within and outside of academia. For instance, cultural commentators like CNET's Daniel Terdiman would idealistically claim that the *Star Wars Uncut* project allowed its participants to see themselves as a professional filmmaking auteur: “the wonderful *Star Wars Uncut* project has been the key to pretending, even if for just 15 seconds, that we've got a little Lucas in us.”¹⁰⁶³ Similarly, Howe himself would even claim that *Star Wars Uncut* “shows the public can have a role in movie-making,” further reinforcing this discourse of democratic empowerment in the field of media production associated with crowdsourcing.¹⁰⁶⁴ Moreover, Robert Lloyd of the *Los Angeles Times* would continue to represent *Star Wars Uncut* as representing the democratization of creative production for amateurs enabled by digital

¹⁰⁶⁰Martin Butler, “On the Ethics and Aesthetics of 'Remaking' in Web 2.0. Environments,” in *Remakes and Remaking: Concepts, Media, and Practices*, eds. Rudiger Heinze and Lucia Kramer (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 175.

¹⁰⁶¹Butler, “On the Ethics and Aesthetics of 'Remaking' in Web 2.0. Environments,” 178.

¹⁰⁶²Butler, “On the Ethics and Aesthetics of 'Remaking' in Web 2.0. Environments,” 176.

¹⁰⁶³Daniel Terdiman, “Star Wars Uncut Creators wow SXSW with Crowdsourcing Tales,” *CNET*, March 13th, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-uncut-creators-wow-sxsw-with-crowdsourcing-tales/>

¹⁰⁶⁴“Star Wars Crowdsourced Film Reaches Million YouTube views,” *BBC*, January 18th, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16700913>

technology.¹⁰⁶⁵ Bolstering this discourse of creative empowerment via digital technology, within the realm of scholarship, Gauntlett has framed the project as displaying “a remarkable array of creativity” despite its basis on a pre-existing text and foregrounded how it is accentuated and enabled by the Web.¹⁰⁶⁶ Likewise, fellow media scholars Graham Meikle and Sherman Young would explicitly connect *Star Wars Uncut* to this utopian narrative of creative and participatory empowerment by characterizing it as a part of an environment where networked media tools greatly simplify “processes of creation, manipulation, submission and combination” and supposedly make “collaboration significantly easier than in other media.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Replicating the framing of crowdsourcing as a neutral and non-hierarchical process that rewards participants regardless of race, gender, or nationality, scholars Jacqueline D. Lipton and John Tehranian, for their part, within a recent 2015 issue of the *Northwestern University Law Review* similarly claim that *Star Wars Uncut*:

... announces alignment with the global *Star Wars* fan community—income or social strata be damned. People once separated by class (or race, age, or gender) can now forge connections through collaborative creative efforts that transcend those categories.¹⁰⁶⁸

In an interview at the Film Society of Lincoln Center after the release of the Director's Cut, Pugh would eventually solidify this discourse of artistic empowerment surrounding the project by stressing how many participants viewed it as an opportunity for greater exposure and as a means for amateurs to express their untapped creative potential:

Everyone is incredibly positive and grateful for giving them the opportunity. A lot of them are rising talent and loved the chance to appear on film: filmmakers, artists, musicians, animators and comedians. Perhaps the most rewarding feedback for me were the people who never created anything on video until *Star Wars Uncut* showed up. It enabled them to be extremely creative and passionate.¹⁰⁶⁹

Incentivizing this desire to be given a free reign to create, to be included in the crowdsourced film, and to get some recognition for this creativity, the updated 2010 version of the *Star Wars*

¹⁰⁶⁵Robert Lloyd, “‘Star Wars Uncut’: The World Remakes A Classic,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 26th, 2010, <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/movies/star-wars-uncut-the-world-remakes-a-classic/>

¹⁰⁶⁶Gauntlett, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0.*, 73, 77.

¹⁰⁶⁷Graham Meikle and Sherman Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 120.

¹⁰⁶⁸Jacqueline D. Lipton and John Tehranian, “Derivative Works 2.0.: Reconsidering Transformative Use in the Age of Crowdsourced Creation,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 109, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 403.

¹⁰⁶⁹Casey Pugh, “Interview: Casey Pugh, ‘Star Wars Uncut,’” interview by Daniel Rubinton, *Film Society of Lincoln Center*, November 27th, 2012, <http://www.filmlinc.com/daily/entry/interview-with-casey-pugh-star-wars-uncut>

Uncut Web platform, in its description of the project, offered the community of participating fans with a pre-existing affection for the *Star Wars* franchise the opportunity to "claim" a scene "and refilm it however you like."¹⁰⁷⁰ By promising participants the freedom to "claim" a scene as their own and reproduce it however they like, this early version of the *Star Wars Uncut* platform characterizes participation in this creative project as offering an empowering opportunity to be creatively free within certain parameters and to acquire a fulfilling sense of ownership over the claimed scene and the resulting reconstruction. The later *Empire Strikes Back* incarnation of the project would make this same creative offer on its Web platform while also explicitly promising participants that, through their contributions, they would "become famous in the best films ever."¹⁰⁷¹ As they both ascribe predominantly intrinsic creative motivations to participants serves to justify the lack of monetary compensation accorded to them for their labour, Pugh's earlier statement and this later enticement to become "famous" within the *Star Wars Uncut* project also interestingly parallels the view of Tryon who has claimed, in relation to crowdsourced media, that users often "choose to participate in a project not out of a desire for compensation but with a view toward building a reputation and being compensated for future work" or being "discovered" and "contributing to a larger collective experiment in storytelling."¹⁰⁷² The opportunity to participate in the creative production of media and to feel a sense of creative freedom and empowerment through this participation and the exposure it would bring, even if minimal or misleading, is thus presented within the online platform for the *Star Wars Uncut* project and the commentary of latter's organizers as a central motivation and benefit for its contributors as well as a positive result of its use of crowdsourcing and the networked digital technologies that enabled it.

The Transformative and Heterogeneous Character of *Star Wars Uncut's* Remakes

Moreover, through this popular and scholarly discourse about the project, *Star Wars Uncut* received a considerable amount of publicity and acclaim due to its innovative and successful application of crowdsourcing to creative enterprises like remakes of *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*, although most of this appreciation was directed to its lead

¹⁰⁷⁰ "Star Wars Uncut: Episode IV: A New Hope," *StarWarsUncut.com*, August 20th, 2008, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100820011348/http://starwarsuncut.com/>

¹⁰⁷¹"Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com>

¹⁰⁷²Chuck Tryon, *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2013), 142.

organizer Pugh. Nevertheless, as a result of the exposure it received, Barbara Klinger would proclaim that *Star Wars Uncut* transformed the once ephemeral presence of fan re-enactments into a “durable good” that is distinct from the cultural property from which it was derived.¹⁰⁷³ In fact, she claims that re-enactments like *Star Wars Uncut* are not only “supports” for the original intellectual property but rather distinctive cultural products “capable of 'massaging' the meaning and affect of sources in unexpected ways.”¹⁰⁷⁴ Supporting this contention, Lipton and Tehranian have also argued that crowdsourced remakes such as *Star Wars Uncut* provide an opportunity for “viewers to experience myriad different artistic perspectives relating to an underlying work” by “juxtaposing different interpretations within a collective body.”¹⁰⁷⁵ Lipton and Tehranian's assertion directly echoes crowdsourcing discourse's tendency to emphasize the diversity of experiences and perspectives that can be harnessed through the online crowd within a crowdsourcing project while also foregrounding how this very heterogeneity contributes to the transformative character of the fan-driven crowdsourced remake. The supposedly transformative dimension of the *Star Wars Uncut* project would seem to support the suggestion of greater creative empowerment and ownership for a diverse range of amateur participants discursively associated with the project and the Web 2.0 paradigm to which it is connected by foregrounding how the affect-driven creative labour of participants and its constituent power enables the production of original and independent media content that is not entirely reducible to the commercial, proprietary strategies of the copyright owners of the *Star Wars* franchise.

Seemingly exemplifying a diverse range of approaches to scene recreations, a plurality of perspectives about *Star Wars: A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*, and an empowering and transformative form of user creativity, the *Star Wars Uncut* project's two iterations foreground and celebrate the connected Web 2.0 landscape of user-generated media content that has rendered the project possible through their very existence, but also the content within each of them. For instance, at the beginning of the Director's Cut of the *A New Hope* remake, the first lines of the film's opening text crawl — “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” — are reproduced as a comment being posted to a user's Twitter page before transitioning to a more

¹⁰⁷³Barbara Klinger, “Re-Enactment: Fans Performing Movie Scenes from the Stage to YouTube,” *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, ed. Paul Grainge (London, British Film Institute, 2011), 211 n2.

¹⁰⁷⁴Klinger, “Re-Enactment: Fans Performing Movie Scenes from the Stage to YouTube,” 210 n2.

¹⁰⁷⁵Lipton and Tehranian, “Derivative Works 2.0,” 419.

traditional incarnation and ending with fictional user comments like "First!" and "Great post. I like your site," as if from the comment section of a blog post. Moreover, in the later remake of *Empire Strikes Back*, *Star Wars Uncut*'s cultivated image of as a project that fosters inclusivity and diverse forms of user creativity is reinforced within its own more radical reconstruction of that film's opening text crawl. Interspersed and inserted within the crawl's original text are new specific words referring to the wide variety of techniques, performers, tools, locations, and objects that participating users have or could adopt to transform and recreate *Empire Strikes Back*'s many scenes — such as dogs, cats, needlepoint, 8-bit animation, cardboard figures, claymation, parking garages, minivans, and swimming pools. The suggestion of diverse, transformative, and user-driven creative contributions found within this altered text, while being a core part of the project's constructed self-image, is further bolstered by the seeming variety of user submissions included within its two remakes and the diversity of styles, media forms, techniques, and performers they contain. This variety is accentuated within the first phase of the *Star Wars Uncut* project by its initial decision to divide *A New Hope* into 473 clips of roughly 15-seconds in length and then, within the linear film version of the remake framed as a Director's Cut by Pugh, reconstruct the original film through the use of the approximately 473 clips of varying content and style submitted by participating users, which are presented quickly succeeding each other at temporal intervals of roughly 15 seconds. The strict formal structure of this first remake contributes to the project's cultivated image as a crowd-driven, non-commercial work that inclusively incorporates a wide range of transformative creative content and participants — an impression of diversity and democratized participation which is often attached to the practice crowdsourcing whether media-related or not. In *Star Wars Uncut*'s subsequent crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back*, which divided the film into 480 scenes that are roughly 15 seconds in length, this impression of inclusivity and creative heterogeneity is further foregrounded because it incorporates shorter fragments of multiple user-submitted versions of these scenes, so as to include the contributions of more participants, even if they are in a truncated form. The ending credits to the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake even reinforces the project's discursive claims about its empowering inclusion of diverse amateur creators by crediting all of the non-professional performers portraying the original film's characters as well as the cinematographers, prop artists, voiceover performers, special effects creators, lighting operators, and costume designers contributing to the remake's recreated scenes.

Furthermore, in the crowdsourced remakes of both *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*, this seeming diversity even extends to the divergent types of participants representing the characters found within these two films' scenes — characters that were performed and embodied by a variety of individual fans; animals; or objects and props like *Star Wars* toys and miniatures of vehicles, stick figures, and puppets, which are animated or physically manipulated by off-screen performers. Moreover, while the vast majority of amateur participants performing in the Director's Cut of the *A New Hope* remake and the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake are English-speaking Caucasian individuals from the West, they also include participants who are: part of a diverse range of age groups and demographic categories; speak a variety of different languages like Spanish, Swedish, Japanese, and French; and engage in different forms of gender expression. This transformative inclusion of diverse contributors and performances is partially the result of the project organizers' active embrace of gender-swapping and race-bending of original characters and the strategic lack of direct restrictions forbidding these practices. For instance, when Uncle Owen first purchases the droids C-3PO and R2-D2 early in *A New Hope*, Owen and C-3PO are represented by a non-white teenage boy and girl within the remake — a type of race-bending that persists elsewhere in both this remake and throughout *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*. Aside from including a greater range of participants from different racial backgrounds, other iconic male and female characters like Luke Skywalker are also performed by women in various reconstructed scenes within the crowdsourced remakes of *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*. For instance, in the remake of *A New Hope*, a teenage girl plays Luke when he speaks to his family about R2-D2's holographic message from Princess Leia and a woman represents Han Solo as he leaves the Mos Eisley Cantina while paying the bartender for the damage he caused to it by shooting the bounty hunter Greedo. Likewise, in *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*, during the scenes of Luke Skywalker carrying Yoda during his Jedi training on Dagoba or of him being warned by Yoda to continue with his training rather than leaving to save his friends following a worrying vision, he is portrayed by women. Conversely, during other reconstructed scenes within these two iterations of the *Star Wars Uncut* remake project, male performers play iconic female characters like Princess Leia. For instance, when Princess Leia first meets Luke while laying down in her prison cell on the Death Star, she is portrayed by a man wearing her feminine costume — a subversive inversion that sexually objectifies him in place of Carrie Fisher or another female performer recreating the scene. *Star Wars Uncut's* strategic choice of

including this type of race-bending and gender-swapping by users adds a transformative element of heterogeneity to the original films and significantly alters their intended meaning, thus making the resulting original work seem to be an independent creation over which participating fans have a greater sense of ownership. As a result of this inclusive strategy, the user contributions within *Star Wars Uncut's* two crowdsourced remakes appear to support the rhetoric of participatory creative empowerment that surround it and other media crowdsourcing projects.

This impression of creative and transformative heterogeneity is further reinforced by the diverse array of user submissions included within the Director's Cut for the *A New Hope* remake and the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* film. For instance, within both incarnations, the visual quality of many of the user-submitted videos varies considerably and appears to be more openly amateurish than some of high definition footage included in more commercial media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day*. Furthermore, the user-generated content submitted to both remakes also reflect their diversity through their joint adoption of a wide range of techniques, media forms, and stylistic and performative approaches to recreating and transforming the *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back* scenes chosen by their participants. For instance, aside from the extensive use of live action video content, a diverse range of full and limited forms of 2D and 3D animation from more professional examples of the medium to rougher, amateur incarnations are incorporated within *Star Wars Uncut's* two crowdsourced remakes. They include machinima, stop-motion animation, cut-out animation, claymation, rotoscoping, 8-bit animation, flash animation, computer-generated animation, and pixilation, but also, in some cases, the use of pans, zooms, and lateral movements by relatively static character representations over drawn background images and storyboards with accompanying audio from a performer. In the *A New Hope* remake, specific examples of this diverse use of animation range include 8-bit computer animation mimicking the style of the video game company LucasArts' the interactive point-and-click adventure games to depict the famous scene where Han Solo shoots the bounty hunter Greedo. Or, conversely, the use of 2D hand-drawn animation to recreate a scene with Luke, Obi-Wan, and Han-Solo within the Millennium Falcon in the style of The Beatles' animated film *Yellow Submarine* (1968). Similarly, *Empire Strikes Back Uncut's* animated submissions vary from machinima using the popular sandbox game *Minecraft* (2011) and the 8-bit and 16-bit animation of classic videogames like *Space Invaders* (1978), *Dig Dug* (1982), *Super Mario Bros* (1985), and *Mortal Kombat* (1992) to characters being animated using

hand-drawn, silhouette-based, stop-motion, and cut-out types of animation. The references to specific media objects and forms from the past and present and from diverging cultures, which these varying styles of animation frequently evoke, foreground the diversity of cultural experiences and knowledge that its participants possessed and incorporated into their contributions, thus reinforcing the image of creative heterogeneity and inclusivity cultivated and partially enabled by *Star Wars Uncut's* project organizers and their strategies.

Although this stylistic variety by the online crowd does transform the meaning of the original films appropriated and converts both remakes in the *Star Wars Uncut* project into unique works that are not entirely derivative of the former, the remakes of *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*, regardless of their transformative interventions, are always intrinsically connected to these two films and, as suggested by Klinger, in a supportive relationship with them. This consistent connection often manifests itself within the two incarnations of *Star Wars Uncut* through the transformative appropriation and manipulation of existing audiovisual material from these two texts, especially in combination with the extensive use of compositing techniques and computer-enabled visual effects. For instance, such techniques are deployed within the Director's Cut of the *A New Hope* remake in order to situate live action performers and objects within the sci-fi locations and backgrounds of the trilogy's first film and, in some cases, transform the latter's original footage. Examples of the various uses of compositing in this first remake include: the superimposition of eye movements and lip flaps from live actors over Star Wars toys of Obi-wan, Luke, and Chewie during Luke and Obi-Wan's negotiation with Han Solo and Chewie in the Mos Eisley Cantina; the overlaying of an amateur actor's face over all of the characters contained within frame grabs from a scene featuring Grand Moff Tarkin being briefed about the unsuccessful search of the planet Dantooine for the Rebels by Imperial officers and Darth Vader; and the placement of distortion-based visual effects over two shots over Darth Vader and Admiral Conan Antonio Motti prior to the latter being choked by the former's use of the Force. Other transformative instances of manipulation involving audiovisual content from *A New Hope* within this first remake include: the use of audio clips from its original actors combined with the appropriation of objects like stick puppets to represent them; the use of rotoscoping to produce an animated recreation of a specific scene using the film's original corresponding footage for it; and the use of split screen effects to juxtapose *A New Hope's* footage of Luke seeing the alien creatures populating the Mos Eisley Cantina with video excerpts from other films like

Terminator (1984) and *Nosferatu the Vampire* (1979). Other usages of visual material from *A New Hope* within Pugh's remake are accompanied by more transformative changes including a recreated scene where original footage of Darth Vader and Grand Moff Tarkin is dubbed over with a new comedic script in which Vader expresses his excitement for the end of the Rebellion, so he can then have "a picnic and pick flowers...and...and chase butterflies." Similar to the user submissions within the two remakes that exploit the incomprehensible sounds of droid characters like R2-D2 within the film to insert new subtitles for them that have them engaging in comedic exchanges with other characters, this transformative adoption of original material by users is even present at the conclusion of the *A New Hope* remake when that film's footage of the awards ceremony for Luke and Han Solo is appropriated and injected with comedic subtitles of Chewie decrying his lack of a medal. Echoing these transformations of the original material from *A New Hope* within this first remake, the participating users within *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* phase of the project continue to appropriate, visually manipulate, distort, rotoscope, and alter the original footage of the trilogy's second film while foregrounding its significant dependence on the latter and supportive connection to it despite the equally diverse forms of transformative content produced by such practices and approaches — a type of content that would seem to create a unique collective work that is not merely derivative of *Empire Strikes Back*.

While always existing in a complementary relationship with *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*, the two remakes of the *Star Wars Uncut* project also bolster this suggestion of independent originality — which partially stems from the transformative character of their diverse contributions and their substantial changes to these films' pre-existing audiovisual content — through radical changes to the presentation and content of their narratives that are more detached from the original footage and soundtrack of the appropriated films. Specifically, some of the more prominent examples of these transformative alterations result from the connection of scenes from these two films to different media forms and cultural references as well as the latter's conversion into more parodic incarnations. These more significant scene reconstructions, for instance, include within the Director's Cut of the *A New Hope* remake: a scene where Darth Vader and a few other Imperial officers talking about the potential vulnerability of the Death Star reframed as a CNN-like news broadcast with multiple talking heads; a recreated scene of Obi-Wan giving Luke his lightsaber and explaining its origins wherein the former is recontextualized as the host of a television infomercial providing

information about lightsaber as if a commodity for sale; and an altered scene of Obi-Wan providing more information about the lightsaber depicted using black and white cinematography and a piano version of the 1931 song "As Times Goes By" as a means to reference *Casablanca* (1942). Within the second remake *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*, some of the more visible transformative scene reconstructions of the original *Star Wars* trilogy's second film by users involve: the appropriation of the distinctive visual style of other filmmakers' work such as Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) or of past modes and periods of filmmaking such as that seen during the Golden Age of classical Hollywood cinema with its predominantly black and white cinematography and its heavy reliance on medium shots and glamour lighting. Other significant transformations include: performers or animated figures representing the film's protagonists now being costumed as the central characters of other media properties like *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969) or *The Wizard of Oz* (1939); scenes of Luke struggling to free himself from the Wampa cave or of the snow-filled planet Hoth parodically presented as a commercial for the fictional beer "Wampa Lager" or a weather news report, respectively; a scene of the Rebels on Hoth escaping to their transportation vehicles musically reinterpreted as a dance party; and Leia's kiss of Luke being followed by comedic live action reaction shots of shock by participating users who understand its incestuous undertones. One particularly prominent and significant comedic reinvention even involves a scene of Darth Vader killing Captain Needa as a means of accepting his apology and his body being removed by Imperial officers being comically altered to present him as absurdly mourning his death. Within all of these diverse user submissions, the original narrative content from scenes within *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back* are substantially altered for comedic effect and interconnected with a variety of other media and cultural references without relying on the appropriation of pre-existing audiovisual content from the claimed scenes of both films as seen in previous paragraphs. Consequently, these more significant scene recreations contribute to the non-commercial transformative character ascribed to and cultivated by the *Star Wars Uncut* project's two crowdsourced remakes and the crowdsourcing campaigns and platforms surrounding them.

By enabling online crowds to create such unique transformative works and including the diverse contributions of their members, Lipton and Tehranian argue that such crowdsourcing-driven user activity contributes to "progress in the arts," thus reinforcing the narrative of artistic empowerment and non-commercial creativity attached to the *Star Wars Uncut* project as a

whole.¹⁰⁷⁶ Furthermore, the remakes' above described heterogeneity of user contributions seemingly complement the claims about the empowering, collective, and transformative creativity and alternative perspectives on media texts enabled by the *Star Wars Uncut* project — which are expressed, whether explicitly or implicitly, by previously mentioned media scholars such as Butler, Gauntlett, Meikle, Young, Klinger, Lipton, and Tehranian along with other cultural commentators like Terdiman, Howe, and Lloyd. More importantly, along with these assertions by academics, this diversity of transformative user-generated content and its production of a unique collective work reinforce Pugh's own framing of *Star Wars Uncut* as a transformative, non-commercial work driven by fans rather than merely a derivative or supportive one in service of the *Star Wars* franchise's copyright holders and their business interests. Moreover, complementing Klinger's earlier suggestion, the unique transformative work resulting from *Star Wars Uncut*'s use of crowdsourcing and the distinctive participatory strategies its organizers adopted to include a greater diversity of user-generated media content and participants also touches upon an element previously addressed within Butler's view of the project. It appears to lend further support to Butler's contention that the remakes produced by media crowdsourcing projects like *Star Wars Uncut* entail a form of reclamation through transformation in that they create original works and, in the process, give participants a newfound sense of ownership over the media texts on which these remakes are based and, more importantly, the remakes themselves.

Contemporaneously exemplifying this tendency to view such works as a means to reclaim media texts at the same time as the *Star Wars Uncut* project were non-profit crowdsourced remakes of existing media like *Our Footloose Remake* (2011) and *Our Robocop Remake* (2014) — two scene-for-scene remakes initiated by David Seger and involving the work of over 50 amateur filmmakers and video creators, most of which are Los Angeles and New York-based filmmakers who are part of the city festivals related to the Channel101 short film platform and its online community. While its participants were driven by a wide range of different motivations, both of these fan-driven crowdsourced remakes were initiated in response to recent or upcoming official remakes of *Footloose* (1984) and *Robocop* (1987), which were eventually produced by the studio system in 2011 and 2014, respectively. Moreover, these two

¹⁰⁷⁶Lipton and Tehranian, “Derivative Works 2.0.: Reconsidering Transformative Use in the Age of Crowdsourced Creation,” 403.

crowdsourced remakes functioned as a partial means of reclaiming the original property in the face of these remakes' potentially misguided changes and flawed transformations. For instance, according to a report by Germain Lussier, in the description of *Our Footloose Remake* that was present on their now defunct website, one of its motivations was even explicitly stated:

In October 2008 it was announced that Paramount Pictures and Dylan Sellers Productions would be remaking the classic *Footloose*, starring Zac Efron. We were fed up. The Hollywood remake machine was going to take another solid movie, put it through the ringer, and make a buck from a younger generation. We decided “Let’s beat them to the punch. Let’s do this remake our way.”

Originally slated to release in June 2010, director complications have pushed the release of “The New Studio Remake *Footloose*” back to 2011. Hollywood can’t make it by 2010? We can. Our fifty-four filmmaker “The *Footloose Remake*” will hit Los Angeles in June, taking the place of Paramount’s release. Let’s undermine the Hollywood remake machine.¹⁰⁷⁷

A similar description propounding this goal and the crowdsourced remake's partial function as a means to reproduce the film on their own terms and send "a message to the Hollywood remake machine" would appear beneath the Vimeo upload of the final linear version of the crowdsourced remake.¹⁰⁷⁸ As for the later “crowd-sourced film project” *Our RoboCop Remake*, Seger and his creative partners would again assert in their website's “about” page that, as “big fans of the original *RoboCop*, and as filmmakers and film fans admittedly rolling our eyes at the Hollywood remake machine, we've elected to do this remake thing our own way” because, in their words, “*if anyone is going to ruin RoboCop, it's us.*”¹⁰⁷⁹ These contemporaneous examples echo Butler's earlier assessment of crowdsourced remakes like *Star Wars Uncut* as means of reclamation. They also seemingly offer further support to commentators and scholars' implicit and explicit characterization of the *Star Wars Uncut* project and its crowdsourced remakes in terms of the transgressive and empowering nature of the diverse counter-readings, forms of creativity, and collective artistic work that result from the online participatory engagement of a wide range of fans with the original texts chosen to be remade — in this case, *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back*. However, despite this characterization of such crowdsourced remakes by organizers,

¹⁰⁷⁷ Germain Lussier, “VOTD: 'Footloose' Remake by 54 Filmmakers,” *Slashfilm*, April 11th, 2011, <http://www.slashfilm.com/votd-footloose-remade-54-filmmakers/>

¹⁰⁷⁸ See the description below “Our *Footloose Remake* (Full Movie),” Vimeo video, 1:37:43, posted by “DaveAOK,” April 9th, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/22179430?ab>

¹⁰⁷⁹ “About Our *Robocop Remake*,” *Ourrobocopremake.com*, accessed February 18th, 2015, <http://www.ourrobocopremake.com/about.html>

scholars, and popular commentators as acts of reclamation or as producing transformative works that are relatively autonomous, this particular type of media crowdsourcing project inherently relies on its organizers' decision to strategically evoke, channel and control the pre-existing affective nostalgia of a wide enough amount of potential participants for popular media properties, so as to entice them into contributing their free and immaterial digital labour to it, accomplish all of the required tasks that need to be completed, and collectively produce a finished work. As a result, the resulting remakes are always dependent on the media properties they appropriate and never truly achieve a substantial degree of separation from them regardless of the varied transformations undertaken within the contributions of their participating users. Consequently, crowdsourced remakes like the two incarnations of the *Star Wars Uncut* project and the diverse forms of user content and activity that drive them always exist, as suggested earlier by Klinger, in a persistent supportive relation with the media objects these remakes seek to recreate — a complementary relationship that later paragraphs will demonstrate to be strategically exploited for the benefit of copyright owners like LucasFilm in order to promote and raise the cultural profile of their media properties and, hence, potentially profit from the cheap labour of networked users.

Star Wars Uncut's Strategies to Encourage Fans to Contribute their Free Labour

Part of a larger apparatus of flexible control strategies increasingly becoming dominant within a twenty first century media ecosystem defined by the formation of platforms open to user-generated content, one already mentioned strategic decision undertaken by *Star Wars Uncut's* project organizers — which exploits the connection of crowdsourced remakes to pre-existing cultural properties and the deep affective relationship the latter tends to cultivate within their fans — is the choice to recreate a popular global media object with an extensive and already existing fanbase. However, another affect-centered strategy intended to flexibly control and guide the digital labour of online *Star Wars* fans and similarly relying on the inherent connection of a remake project to the appropriated media texts — which is undertaken by the *Star Wars Uncut* project's organizers — is more discursive in character. Attached to the project's surrounding discourse of creative empowerment for amateurs, this partly discursive strategy involves suggesting to potential contributing fans — through its open call, the public commentary of its organizers, and various platform features — that participation within the *Star Wars Uncut* remakes and the Web platforms that enable them in collaboration with other fans

will allow them to achieve a greater sense of proximity to the narrative universe and production of *Star Wars* media and be part of an affectively satisfying and historic media enterprise driven by a truly global community of fellow franchise fans. Moreover, it also occasionally entailed the use of evocative rhetoric that actively sought to appeal to the affective nostalgia as well as the past and present feelings of online fans for *Star Wars*. This strategy is predominantly deployed within the textual material composing the open calls of *Star Wars Uncut's* two incarnations and throughout their pre-production and production phases through the commentary of its organizers and the paratextual content of the project found within its respective Web platforms. The primary purpose of this partially discursive strategy is to stimulate the pre-existing affective dispositions of online users for the *Star Wars* franchise and, through this affective stimulation, increase the chance of compelling them into participating within the project and contributing their digital labour for free or little to no form of extrinsic compensation.

Exemplifying this tendency and reinforcing *Star Wars Uncut's* dominant representation as a fan-driven work, the initial trailer for the *A New Hope* incarnation of the project containing its open call informs the viewer that “Star Wars fans from around the world are joining forces [...] To remake the classic everyone loves” and promises that, by participating within this first remake, they will be “part of the biggest fan recreation in the universe.”¹⁰⁸⁰ The open call for the project thus promises fans the affectively charged experience of being part of the *Star Wars* community and a greater collective endeavour with it through their participation. Likewise, in one of his first blog posts promoting the project, Pugh would also ask potential contributors “Have you ever wanted to be in a Star Wars film?,” effectively promising them that, if they participate, they would be included within a *Star Wars* production and, by extension, its narrative universe.¹⁰⁸¹ Moreover, in a 2009 interview with Matthew Liddy during the crowdsourcing campaign for *Star Wars Uncut's* first remake, Pugh would even implicitly acknowledge how the project's use of popular media texts like the *Star Wars* films and its explicit offer of inclusion within their narrative world to participants have the potential to attract and affectively compel fans into contributing to the project when he proclaims that giving “people an easy chance to star

¹⁰⁸⁰“Star Wars Uncut Trailer,” Vimeo Video, 01:59, posted by “Casey Pugh,” September 27th, 2009, <https://vimeo.com/6788001>

¹⁰⁸¹ Casey pugh, “Have You Ever Wanted to be in a Star Wars Film?,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 7th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/137499722/have-you-ever-wanted-to-be-in-a-star-wars-film>

in one of their favorite movies is such an enticing opportunity.”¹⁰⁸² In this same interview, he would even partially attribute the widespread participation of online *Star Wars* fans to this desire for inclusion within the first remake of *A New Hope* by suggesting that, while they also contribute to it due to the affective pleasure or "fun" they receive from engaging and participating in the production process of a *Star Wars*-related media project itself, “the energy people put into the process” is also “partly fueled by the fact that they want to see themselves in the final edit.”¹⁰⁸³ In other words, as Pugh would again claim following the conclusion of the crowdsourcing campaign and prior to the release of the Director's Cut in 2012, the affect-driven labour that fans contribute to this project was partially motivated by a strong desire “to be in the universe.”¹⁰⁸⁴

Aside from cultivating this desire within the material surrounding the first remake's open call such as *Star Wars Uncut*'s official blog, Pugh would also attempt to compel and encourage online fans into participating in the project by using rhetoric that appealed to their past and present affective relationship with *Star Wars* and its commodities while also constructing the impression of being part of a larger fan community with shared experiences. For instance, on the same blog mentioned above, Pugh sought to stimulate the affect of fans to entice them into participating within *Star Wars Uncut* by referring to their past playful engagement with the franchise's toys and encouraging them to "Pull out those old Star Wars toys" in order to recreate their claimed scenes within the project — a strategic use of discourse that has the potential to re-awaken fans' deep-seated childhood affection for the *Star Wars* series and its surrounding merchandise as well as their affect-laden experiences with them while cultivating this shared sense of community revolving around the *Star Wars* franchise.¹⁰⁸⁵ The affective tendencies of *Star Wars* fans are actively stimulated through the above strategic choices of *Star Wars Uncut*'s organizers while the affectively charged discursive promise of shared communal membership resulting from their re-awakening is also cultivated and then articulated with participation within

¹⁰⁸²Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, accessed March 21st, 2014, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹⁰⁸³Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, accessed March 21st, 2014, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹⁰⁸⁴“Web 2.0. Expo NY 2011, Casey Pugh, VHX.tv, “Star Wars Uncut: Crowdsourcing the Force,” YouTube Video, 10:36, posted by “O’reilly,” October 14th, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlxvzt7rKU4>

¹⁰⁸⁵ Casey Pugh, "It's only been 48 hours and there already have....," *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 10th, 2009, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/139170919/its-only-been-48-hours-and-there-already-have>

the crowdsourced remake of *A New Hope*. Through this fan-dependent form of affective modulation via the strategic use of *Star Wars*-related rhetoric and discourse, *Star Wars Uncut*'s organizers are attempting to elicit the large-scale participatory and affect-driven digital labour that the project requires from contributing fans. More specifically, they seek to achieve the heightened and low-cost form of productivity and value resulting from this labour by triggering their subjective affective attachments to the *Star Wars* series through various discursive and non-discursive strategies which evoke them and implicitly promise potential contributors that, through their participation, they can recapture and reconnect with the pleasurable emotions and feelings that often accompany such affect. Reflective of communicative capitalism's apparatus of flexible control and its increasing reliance on affective manipulation to extract value from connected citizens, the organizers' above affective-discursive strategies to increase participation among online users by tapping into the visible and seemingly global affect of popular media fans would ultimately prove to be successful in that they managed to elicit a large-scale and passionate collective response from fans and affectively compel them to undertake the large amount of free labour required to complete all of the 473 scenes necessary for *Star Wars Uncut*'s first remake. Although the aforementioned techniques are mainly used by its managers in order to strategically evoke the affect of fans to increase participation within *Star Wars Uncut*'s crowdsourcing process, such strategies would also mask the exploitative and unequal relationship that tend to emerge between the participants and organizers of media crowdsourcing projects by highlighting the passionate participation they evoked within contributing fans and using that visible affection to characterize their motivations and desires as being solely intrinsic. For example, by claiming in a 2010 article for the *New York Times* that the primary "reward for people is doing the work" and "actually re-enacting the scenes," Pugh relies on the visible affective pleasure of the fans recreating segments of *A New Hope* for the project in order to characterize this pleasurable process of reproduction as the main reward they are seeking to obtain by participating in the project.¹⁰⁸⁶ Combined with the aforementioned discursive strategy intended to productively stimulate fan affect, Pugh's equally strategic foregrounding of the resulting and highly visible passion of connected fans for being able to recreate iconic moments within the *Star Wars* universe and his speculative claims about their exclusively intrinsic

¹⁰⁸⁶Brian Stelter, "An Emmy for Rebuilding a Galaxy," *New York Times*, August 27th, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/28/arts/television/28uncut.html?_r=0

motivations for participating effectively displaces any potential questions about proper remuneration for their digital labour while also minimizing their potential desire for some form of financial compensation and extrinsic reward in exchange for it.

Furthermore, as an extension of the above affective-discursive strategies, in the early incarnations of the Web platform for the *A New Hope* remake emerging during 2009 and 2010, *Star Wars Uncut's* affectively charged promise of inclusion within the fictional world and production of *Star Wars* and of greater proximity to them re-appears through the strategic use of the widely known terminology, images, and characters of the franchise to situate potential participants within this narrative space. For example, when seeking to view one of the scenes to be reconstructed from *A New Hope* via the Web platform in 2011 in order to claim it, upload a submission, or comment below a contributed scene or user profile, participating users interacting with that version of the platform were explicitly addressed as "Padawans" — Jedi apprentices — if they were "first time users" within a visible prompt instructing them to create an account with Vimeo, the primary hosting service for the project's videos. Conversely, they were called "Jedis" and told "may the Force be with you" if they were "return users" within a parallel prompt informing them to simply log in to Facebook or Vimeo.¹⁰⁸⁷ Likewise, this strategic attempt to associate and connect the users of this updated platform with the terminology and figures of the *Star Wars* franchise in order to make them feel as if they are a more integral part of it also extended to the platform's prominent use of symbolic image-based badges representing characters like Han Solo, Chewie, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and C-3PO as rewards to users for their participation or, more specifically, their recreation of particular scenes featuring these characters.¹⁰⁸⁸ Coupled with the previously mentioned affective-discursive strategies and the narrative of amateur creative empowerment surrounding *Star Wars Uncut*, its organizers' choice of such platform-related rhetoric and features also reinforces the affectively charged promise contained within its open call, which suggests that participation within the project would enable users to be democratically included within — and become closer to — the narrative space and films of the *Star Wars* franchise and these films' production process.

¹⁰⁸⁷ For instance, within the Web platform, on the profile page for a contributor named Chris Hogan, if a user interacts with the "post comment" tab, the above prompts appear. See "Chris Hogan," *Star Wars Uncut*, October 20th, 2011, Internet Archive screengrab,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111020105647/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/profile/88>

¹⁰⁸⁸ To witness these badges, see "Chris Hogan," *Star Wars Uncut*, October 20th, 2011, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111020105647/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/profile/88>

Similar to this first phase of the *Star Wars Uncut* project and its crowdsourcing campaign to remake *A New Hope*, in the 2012 open call to potential participants for the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake contemporaneous with the release of the Director's Cut of the first iteration, Pugh would again prime the productive affection of fans for the *Star Wars* franchise and stress their connection to its narrative universe through the deployment of rhetoric referring to the series' popular narrative content. While framing this new iteration of the project as an opportunity "to be a part of the largest fan remake ever," he declares that "The Force is with us. All of us" as a means to encourage fans to participate and an assurance of their ability to successfully collaborate and complete this remake together.¹⁰⁸⁹ This very specific reference to one of the franchise's most cherished lines of dialogue is designed to position participating fans as force-sensitive characters and heroes in the *Star Wars* universe and thus, once again, tap into their affection for the franchise, so as to better incentivize them to come together and contribute to this project for what is implicitly framed as the greater good. In addition, during the simultaneous 2012 launch of the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* project's Web platform, the latter's opening web page would feature a poster representing the original film alongside the instruction "Claim Your Scene: Help Us Finish This Film! You're Our Only Hope."¹⁰⁹⁰ This part of *Empire Strikes Back*'s open call reproduces and slightly alters a highly memorable and narratively important dialogue fragment from Princess Leia's initiating distress call to Obi-Wan within *A New Hope* in order to link participants with its heroic protagonists and further stimulate their affect for the series as a means of compelling them to participate and contribute their immaterial labour to the project. Moreover, in the "About" page of the Web platform for the *Star Wars Uncut* project and its remake of the second original trilogy film *Empire Strikes Back*, its organizers continue to situate participants within the narrative universe of *Star Wars* by explicitly characterizing them as the "future Jedis of the world."¹⁰⁹¹ Moreover, if an *Empire Strikes Back* scene was already claimed by enough participants on the 2012 Web platform, users would be informed of the scene's claimed status and apologetically addressed as a "young

¹⁰⁸⁹ Casey Pugh, "The Star Wars Uncut Saga Continues...," *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, August 30th, 2012, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/30524882358/empire-launch>

¹⁰⁹⁰ "StarWarsUncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, September 22nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120922142650/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/empire>

¹⁰⁹¹ "About," *StarWarsuncut.com*, Sept. 22, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120922142707/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/about>

Padawan."¹⁰⁹² Furthermore, even the Rules and Guideline section for this later *Empire Strikes Back* remake combines the narrative of creative and fan empowerment surrounding the previous incarnation of the *Star Wars Uncut* project with the continued promise of inclusion within the *Star Wars* franchise and universe by informing potential participants that “This is your moment in the Star Wars sun.”¹⁰⁹³ These discursive attempts to reinforce the pre-existing affect that fans have for *Star Wars* and subsequently harness it for productive ends were recurring strategies adopted by project organizers like Pugh in order to incentivize additional participation within the two crowdsourced remakes of the *Star Wars Uncut* project. In addition, somewhat akin to commercial projects that seek to emotionally engage customers for promotional purposes, this affective appeal was also evidently designed to compel online fans who encountered *Star Wars Uncut* to enthusiastically spread and further circulate its open call to potential participants and, through this harnessed affect-driven labour, increase the amount of attention and news coverage drawn by the project for the benefit of organizers like Pugh and *Star Wars*' copyright holders. However, while the first phase of *Star Wars Uncut* with its remake of *A New Hope* was more of an independent, fan-driven, and non-profit work by Pugh that was more autonomous from Lucasfilm, as will be argued later, it was still openly embraced and supported by the latter due to the beneficial promotional effects resulting from this affect-driven labour to the point that its successor — *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* — with its similarly strategic and exploitative manipulation of fan affect within its open call and platform became more closely integrated within Lucasfilm and Disney's marketing strategies and their capitalistic pursuit of profit while constructing a more unequal power relationship between the subsequent project's various stakeholders including these media corporations.

The Transmission of Affect among *Star Wars Uncut*'s Participating Crowds

Confirming how the contagious affective stimulation of the productive online crowd by organizers like Pugh is a key beneficial element of its approach to crowdsourcing, Jamie Wilkinson, one of *Star Wars Uncut*'s producers, has asserted that the practice of crowdsourcing, which the project strategically adopts, enables “those with infectious ideas” like Pugh “to rope in people from all over the world to help out with something” and tap “into the creative drive of

¹⁰⁹² "Scene 1," *StarWarsUncut.com*, August 29th, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120829232003/http://www.starwarsuncut.com:80/empire/1>

¹⁰⁹³“Rules – Empire Strikes Back: Uncut,” *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/rules>

hundreds of thousands of people around the world” by “just giving them something to do.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Wilkinson's use of viral metaphors to describe the effects of a crowdsourcing project's open call recalls the emerging conceptions of the contagious transmission of affect and affect-driven ideas and beliefs amidst crowds by scholars like Brennan, Papacharissi, and Sampson — especially those connected by digital networks — which were described in this dissertation's introduction and heavily indebted to late nineteenth century crowd theories by figures like Le Bon and Tarde. For instance, echoing Wilkinson's use of viral metaphors, Sampson's Tardean understanding of affect foregrounds the latter's contagious capacity to circulate via networks to other members of the online crowd and influence them to unconsciously imitate a form of affective behaviour.¹⁰⁹⁵ More importantly, recognizing the increasing role of affective manipulation as a means of flexible control within capitalism, he acknowledges how capitalistic enterprises are increasingly seeking to exploit and control this networked form of affective transmission by tailoring and preplanning affective experiences that can suggest and spread at a distance a feeling to users that could more readily result in a desired purposive act like consumption.¹⁰⁹⁶ Likewise, heavily drawing on Jenkins' concept of affective economics and, more implicitly, on Jodi Dean's understanding of affective capture within communicative capitalism, Andrejevic's recent work has also stressed how the communicative actions of online users now dominating our contemporary media ecosystem informed by the Web 2.0 paradigm and the affective expressions they tend to create and circulate all contribute a lot of data that are increasingly exploited by the commercial owners of platforms in order to better harness, modulate, and control the affective impulses of a population for more capitalistic and profit-driven ends.¹⁰⁹⁷ However, in contrast to Dean's previously described conception of affective capture within the realm of social media or Sampson's Tardean notion of network-based affective contagion, *Star Wars Uncut's* strategic appropriation of discursive and visual elements within its open call and the various incarnations of its Web platforms as a means to productively stimulate the affective nostalgia and passion of fans for *Star Wars* does not result in the totalizing capture of their fans' affect or cause all fans with a pre-existing affective attachment to the franchise to blindly and uniformly imitate and

¹⁰⁹⁴Daniel Terdiman, “Star Wars Uncut Creators wow SXSW with Crowdsourcing Tales,” *CNET*, March 13th, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-uncut-creators-wow-sxsw-with-crowdsourcing-tales/>

¹⁰⁹⁵Sampson, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, 143, 144-150, 157.

¹⁰⁹⁶Sampson, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*, 161-162, 166-167, 170-171.

¹⁰⁹⁷Mark Andrejevic, *Infoglut: How Too Much Information is Changing the Way We Think and Know*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 46-47, 52-53, 58-61.

further transmit the positive affective experience that the project seeks to evoke and circulate. As already suggested by autonomist Marxists and various affect theories, the inherently excessive character of affect and the subjective and contingent manner in which it informs the actions of individuals, even as they enable the transmission of a particular form of affect across individual bodies, also ultimately prevents this type of totalizing capture or such deterministic effects. Nevertheless, supporting Andrejevic's contention that the useful data produced as a result of the affect-driven actions of networked users can often influence corporate entities to attempt to modulate and channel their affective tendencies, the large quantity of data resulting from the Michael Jackson fans participating in the White Glove Tracker project foregrounded how a stronger affect-driven form of online participation in a crowdsourcing task could be elicited through the strategic deployment of a popular media object like a video-based musical performance of a famous musician and the resulting online transmission of the contagious affect of fans for this media object. This data clearly inspired *Star Wars Uncut's* Casey Pugh and his fellow organizers to construct an affective atmosphere for *Star Wars Uncut* and its Web platforms that encouraged the participatory creation of already invested *Star Wars* fans and the further circulation of the evoked affect online. Pugh's strategic modulation and channeling of an existing fan community's affective tendencies ultimately encouraged a larger enough quantity of fans to complete the remake's film segments and the enthusiastic sharing of information about the project — tasks that were necessary for its successful completion. Even the Web 2.0-inspired narrative of amateur creative empowerment, which is strategically promulgated by *Star Wars Uncut* and its proponents, contained its own affective charge and sought to replicate the widespread type of online participation cultivated within platforms like YouTube with similar rhetoric. It bolstered the promise of affective satisfaction implicitly associated with participation within this supposedly innovative crowdsourcing project and encouraged further user activity in service of it. Ultimately, through its strategic use of a cherished fictional media object and of discursive and visual references to its many narrative elements along with this discourse of amateur empowerment, *Star Wars Uncut's* affective priming thus stimulated subjective affective responses within potential contributors that increased the chances for the project's modular tasks to be completed and for knowledge about it to be spread laterally across other online networks. Moreover, it reflects one of the visible strategies making up the apparatus of flexible control increasingly found within our contemporary digital media ecosystem informed by the

communication-centric paradigm of neoliberal capitalism becoming dominant within the twenty first century. Avoiding a direct and coercive form of control and management, such affective strategies contributed to a foundation or platform that encouraged participants to express their singular affective propensities, thus according them a greater degree of agency within the production process. While many scholars engaging in questions of affect and power have a tendency to frame this new mode of control as being distinct from a more discursive, ideological, and disciplinary paradigms of power, the discursive appeals of media crowdsourcing projects like *Star Wars Uncut* are often the vehicles of this flexible manipulation of affect and lay the groundwork for an affective atmosphere designed to construct, through disciplinary means, a large group of productive neoliberal subjects autonomous enough to fulfil the required modular tasks for the primary benefit of other already established figures and socio-economic actors. As with Web 2.0-based media platforms like YouTube, the spread of various forms of affect and a utopian discourse of empowerment meant to trigger and support them go hand in hand within the modulatory paradigm of control detailed within this dissertation and once again embodied by media crowdsourcing projects and the rules, strategies, and affordances shaped by their organizers and corporate partners.

The Discursive Disempowerment of the Crowd within and beyond *Star Wars Uncut*

Supporting this overall perception of *Star Wars Uncut* being a project whose use of crowdsourcing enables its organizers to better shape and channel the crowd's affect towards productive ends more in line with their interests, Pugh and other commentators covering it would frequently draw on the same Web 2.0 rhetoric within crowdsourcing discourse about the flexible harnessing and guidance of the online crowd's productive power, creativity, and intelligence by project organizers. For example, in interviews, Pugh has explicitly represented *Star Wars Uncut's* remake of *A New Hope* as a media crowdsourcing project that takes advantage of “the Internet’s power to harness people’s creativity.”¹⁰⁹⁸ Strengthening such claims, other commentators like Terdiman would argue that *Star Wars Uncut's* organizers illustrate how “the power of the crowd,” a utopian expression popularized by Howe in relation to crowdsourcing, could be

¹⁰⁹⁸Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

productively harnessed.¹⁰⁹⁹ Aside from asserting that media crowdsourcing projects like *Star Wars Uncut* enable the "power of the crowd" to more strongly manifest itself and emerge following the work of Howe, Pugh's subsequent *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake project, within its Rules and Guidelines, would also define itself as only "as great as our collective minds create it,"¹¹⁰⁰ partially drawing on the Web 2.0 rhetoric of collaborative empowerment and beneficial diversity that often surrounds crowdsourcing discourse and related idealistic concepts promulgated by figures like O'Reilly and Surowiecki like collective intelligence and the wisdom of the crowd. Similarly, Lipton and Tehranian would also frame creative crowdsourcing, which is transformative, as channeling "the strength of collective wisdom and insight" to produce a work that no singular author or group of authors existing in a common cultural space could replicate.¹¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in a talk for the Ignite lecture series, Pugh himself, using similar language, would jokingly describe crowdsourcing as a means of "harnessing humans" that entails "free, cheap labour and allowing people – a mass amount of people – to create content for you."¹¹⁰² In this same lecture, he even foregrounded the importance of his role as the leader and manager of the project by again jokingly informing his audience on the need to "Herd the cattle" during the crowdsourcing process because "people, they don't stay on task..."¹¹⁰³ Recalling Jonathan Gray's critique of the concept of the crowd within celebratory crowdsourcing discourse, Pugh's characterization of his participants in such homogeneous and subservient terms highlights his status as *Star Wars Uncut's* authorial leader, a position that accords him a considerable degree of cultural power within and outside the project. Bolstering this image of himself as the project's manager, in an interview with Daniel Rubinton from the Film Society of Lincoln center, Pugh would stress the necessity of managing the internet crowd and of giving its members "the right tools and focus" in order for them to be truly creative and successfully contribute to the project.¹¹⁰⁴ Paralleling *Life in a Day* and the critique of the crowd's framing by Schmidt in the

¹⁰⁹⁹Daniel Terdiman, "Star Wars Uncut Creators wow SXSW with Crowdsourcing Tales," *CNET*, March 13th, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-uncut-creators-wow-sxsw-with-crowdsourcing-tales/>

¹¹⁰⁰"Rules – Empire Strikes Back: Uncut," *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/rules>

¹¹⁰¹Lipton and Tehranian, "Derivative Works 2.0.: Reconsidering Transformative Use in the Age of Crowdsourced Creation," 403.

¹¹⁰²"Making Star Wars Uncut by Casey Pugh, Ep. 73," YouTube Video, 6:41, posted by "Ignite," September 28th, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ-GpIS-rCE>

¹¹⁰³Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁴Casey Pugh, "Interview: Casey Pugh, 'Star Wars Uncut'," Interview by Daniel Rubinton, *Film Society Lincoln Center*, November 27th, 2012, <http://www.filmlinc.com/daily/entry/interview-with-casey-pugh-star-wars-uncut>

previous chapter, the crowd participating in *Star Wars Uncut*, when its diversity is not highlighted or celebrated, is often viewed and treated by Pugh and others as a somewhat homogeneous, disorganized, and dehumanized Other whose productive capacity can be encouraged, loosely controlled, and cheaply channeled by a necessary leader for their benefit, albeit only if the right conditions and affordances are provided. This characterization of participants has the effect of positioning them in a more subservient role in service of the initiating creator's artistic goals and, as a result, disempowers them through the implicit justification of their inability to exert the same kind of creative agency or input as project organizers when it comes to the structure and final form of *Star Wars Uncut* and the architecture of the Web platforms through which it is shaped.

Other Project Strategies to Encourage and Include the Crowd's Creative Labour

Aside from choosing to exploit fans' passionate attachment to the *Star Wars* franchise through a variety of affective-discursive strategies, Pugh and his fellow organizers were also compelled to construct the various web platforms for *Star Wars Uncut* in a particular manner and adopt certain rules and guidelines for users in order to motivate and enable a large and diverse amount of potential participants to freely contribute their labour. For instance, certain platform features again established a direct connection to the narrative world of *Star Wars* while converting the labour of participants into a form of play through the process of gamification. Elsewhere, writers Gabe Zicherman and Joselin Linder have emphasized the importance of gamification and game design to structuring a “winning crowdsourced experience” that participants find compelling and which can help give them a sense of reward, particularly when “there are insufficient resources to pay the full cost of labor.”¹¹⁰⁵ Drawing on this growing recognition of the proximity of labour with play and leisure within a post-industrial economy that was already outlined in the introduction,¹¹⁰⁶ Brabham has also foregrounded how crowdsourcing often “blurs the line between what constitutes work and play.”¹¹⁰⁷ Blurring this same boundary, *Star Wars Uncut's* 2010 version of its Web platform rewarded participants with badges visually

¹¹⁰⁵ Gabe Zicherman and Joselin Linder, *The Gamification Revolution: How Leaders Leverage Mechanics to Crush the Competition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 198.

¹¹⁰⁶ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, 66, 111-112, 145-146; Ross, *No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and its Hidden Costs*, 19, 88

¹¹⁰⁷ Daren C. Brabham, “Moving the Crowd at Istockphoto: The Composition of the Crowd and Motivations for Participation in a Crowdsourcing Application,” *First Monday* 13, no. 6 (June 2nd, 2008), <http://firstmonday.org/article/%20view/2159/1969>

representing iconic characters from the *Star Wars* franchise like Han Solo, Chewie, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and C-3PO among many others. According to fellow organizer Annalise Pruitt in Tardiman's CNET article, the platform gave participants “a badge for every "Star Wars" character they fit into the scenes they submitted.”¹¹⁰⁸ These features of the initial *Star Wars Uncut* platform and the discourse surrounding it thus gamified the participation of its users through the integration of these meritocratic statuses and badges, once again framing their contributions as a form of play with the fictional world of *Star Wars* rather than productive labour. Through this strategy, the project's organizers again exploited fan affect for the franchise, so they could create the right affective environment and better energize fans to participate for intrinsic, personal reasons. This type of gamification ultimately uses a sense of play as a means of increasing the free participation of users, but also to distract participants from the unequal power relations that exist between the contributing crowd, the copyright owners of the *Star Wars* franchise, and Pugh and his team of co-creators.

Furthermore, in order to enable users to participate more easily and upload submissions to the crowdsourced remake of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Pugh also took advantage of Vimeo's “free, public API that allows anyone to interface with Vimeo however they want” when creating *Star Wars Uncut's* first web platform, a decision that allowed him create a crowdsourcing video project using the API and keep *Star Wars Uncut* as his “own personal project.”¹¹⁰⁹ Once launched as test web platform, Pugh describes its easy-to-use interface and initial affordances for users in the following manner:

It was a grid of Star Wars thumbnails. So they could see, visually, what part of the movie it is. And they click it, and they watch the fifteen-second scene, and if they liked it, they accepted that scene¹¹¹⁰

In the earliest incarnation of the *Star Wars Uncut* project's Web platform in 2009, users were thus presented with this interactive mosaic-like grid of thumbnail images, which allowed them to view all of the various scenes of *Star Wars - Episode IV - A New Hope* to be remade and find

¹¹⁰⁸Daniel Terdiman, “Star Wars Uncut Creators wow SXSW with Crowdsourcing Tales,” *CNET*, March 13th, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-uncut-creators-wow-sxsw-with-crowdsourcing-tales/>

¹¹⁰⁹Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹¹¹⁰Casey Pugh, “Exclusive Interview with Casey Pugh, Producer of Star Wars Uncut,” *Maroon Weekly*, Interview by Chris Zebo, September 7th, 2010, <http://maroonweekly.com/exclusive-interview-with-emmy-award-winner-casey-pugh-creator-of-star-wars-uncut> [inactive]

what and how many scenes were still free to be claimed, taken, or already finished with the help of colour-coded filtering tabs and indicators superimposed on the interactive screenshots themselves.¹¹¹¹ On this past version of the project's Web platform, once participants click on a scene wishing to claim it, they can watch it and be informed of its availability; if it is available, they can then click and choose to "take the scene" after they register an account with digital media platform *Vimeo.com*, authorize it to interact with the *Star Wars Uncut* platform, and return to the platform to download the original 15-second scene to be remade. If unavailable, they can click on a tab to see the submitted finished scenes. Conversely, they can also interact with another "random" tab situated below the scene to be given an alternative scene that is also available.¹¹¹² The earlier 2009 prototype for *Star Wars Uncut's* web platform would also reinforce the project's narrative of participatory inclusion on its home and FAQ pages by framing the project as offering 473 people the opportunity and "chance to recreate Star Wars: A New Hope" and justifying the platform's inclusion of multiple submissions for the same scene through its stated intention to enable "everyone" to be "a part of Star Wars Uncut."¹¹¹³ A similar rationalization would be offered to explain the existence of multiple versions of a scene within the subsequent *Empire Uncut* phase of the project.¹¹¹⁴ This narrative of inclusivity is even further solidified by the early promise within this 2009 platform's FAQ page to have "All scenes" be "kept forever so that we can watch Star Wars a completely different way every time."¹¹¹⁵ For the users participating on this initial platform, a 30 day deadline was initially imposed in order to compel participants to upload their reconstructions of the claimed scenes and, if they failed to meet it, their claim was released, so other participants could select it.¹¹¹⁶ Moreover, according to Pugh, participants could "choose a maximum of three" clips "to recreate" but "they weren't allowed to choose another that was adjacent to their previous one in order to keep the spirit of

¹¹¹¹ "Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, November 3rd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091103040245/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/>

¹¹¹² "Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, November 3rd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091103040245/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/>

¹¹¹³ "Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, November 3rd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091103040245/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/>

¹¹¹⁴ "FAQ," *StarWarsUncut.com*, September 22nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120922142623/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/faq>

¹¹¹⁵ "Star Wars Uncut," *StarWarsUncut.com*, November 3rd, 2009, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091103040245/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/>

¹¹¹⁶ Casey Pugh, "Wow! Only Four Days have Passed Since the Project...," *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 12th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/140277788/wow-only-four-days-have-passed-since-the-project>

randomness.”¹¹¹⁷ With this platform and its distinctive constraints, the project's 473, 15-second scenes were quickly claimed within four days on July 12th, 2009.¹¹¹⁸ However, an updated platform was soon constructed afterwards, which would allow for the existence of multiple versions of individual scenes as well as fan voting on the uploaded content.¹¹¹⁹ This new platform for the first incarnation of *Star Wars Uncut* would release all the scenes of the film to be claimed again and then periodically release them again in a subsequent 'round' with the intention of keeping an “even distribution of scenes so people aren't favoring any specific ones.”¹¹²⁰ Another constraint imposed by the rules of Pugh's platform was that participants produce the reconstructions of the scene they first claimed before claiming other videos.¹¹²¹ As a result of these constructed parameters and constraints, participants were afforded the ability and autonomy to pick from a wider range of scene choices. Moreover, while adhering to these conditions, they were also enabled to creatively reinterpret scenes using whatever representational style possible and without many content-related constraints. However, due to *Star Wars Uncut's* association with a copyrighted work, restrictions against offensive and pornographic material were enforced and part of its guidelines, thus limiting some of the greater participatory agency seemingly afforded by the platform's open architecture and the project's evolving rules. In addition, one of Pugh's rules did require that participant submissions on the platform not include the original film's soundtrack “on top, or music on top” and instead “just to do it raw,” so he could eventually more easily “layer the soundtrack on top and make it more of a coherent experience.”¹¹²² Nevertheless, amidst these affordances and constraints, participants possessed a considerable degree of agency that enabled them to upload a relatively wide range of potential reconstructions.

¹¹¹⁷KC Ifeanyi, “Behind the Ultimate Crowdsourced Film--'Star Wars Uncut.’” *FastCoCreate*, January 26th, 2012, <http://www.fastcocreate.com/1679460/behind-the-ultimate-crowdsourced-film-star-wars-uncut>

¹¹¹⁸Casey Pugh, “Wow! Only Four Days have Passed Since the Project...,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 12th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/140277788/wow-only-four-days-have-passed-since-the-project>

¹¹¹⁹Casey Pugh, “Upgrades this Weekend!,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 16th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/142857118/upgrades-this-weekend>

¹¹²⁰Casey Pugh, “Round Two!,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, July 21st, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/146082768/round-two>

¹¹²¹*Ibid.*

¹¹²²Casey Pugh, “Exclusive Interview with Casey Pugh, Producer of Star Wars Uncut,” *Maroon Weekly*, Interview by Chris Zebo, September 7th, 2010, <http://maroonweekly.com/exclusive-interview-with-emmy-award-winner-casey-pugh-creator-of-star-wars-uncut> [inactive]

In addition to seemingly enabling this creative agency through such , as early as October 2009, Pugh stated that he intended to keep the scenes that are not included in the crowd-voted linear version of the project or a Director's Cut and make them available for spectatorship on the platform by creating “an online version where you can watch Star Wars a different way every time you view it,” somewhat akin to the procedural nature of Bard's *Man with the Movie Camera: A Global Remake*.¹¹²³ He also promised in January 2010 that a new version of the *Star Wars Uncut* platform would enable “tagging on individual scenes, from animation to parody” in order to facilitate this dynamic sorting of multiple reconstructed scenes according to user preferences.¹¹²⁴ In May 2010, an updated version of the Web platform was indeed launched and began to move towards this supposedly more 'democratic' and interactive incarnation of the *Star Wars Uncut* project. This new version of the platform adopted other features of social media platforms and allowed users to “find and sort content more easily,” “connect and comment on other users’ scenes,” and interact with “a great new viewer that lets you pick how to play the movie.”¹¹²⁵ Mimicking the implementation of social media features spreading throughout the Web, the option to "like" videos and "comment" beneath them and other user profiles were added to this new version of the platform. Eventually in this updated 2010 version of the platform, Pugh's promised architectural gesture towards a more democratic actualization of the crowdsourced remake of *Star Wars: A New Hope* was offered through the introduction of a media player feature that stitches the "highest rated" submitted reproductions of all the original film's scenes together — as voted by the community of fans on the platform — to create a streaming version of the remake composed of "all the incredible submissions brought to you by Star Wars fans and filmmakers from all over the world."¹¹²⁶ Thus, a version of the completed remake was made available to users on the platform through the introduction of this viewer in August 2010 and it was “made up of all the highest rated scenes voted on by the fans and

¹¹²³Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹¹²⁴Liz Shannon Miller, “As Star Wars: Uncut Nears Completion, What Does the Future Hold?,” *Gigaom*, January 15th, 2010, <https://gigaom.com/2010/01/15/as-star-wars-uncut-nears-completion-what-does-the-future-hold/>

¹¹²⁵ Casey Pugh, “Star Wars Uncut v2,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, May 31st, 2010, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/650879605/star-wars-uncut-v2>

¹¹²⁶ “Watch,” *StarWarsUncut.com*, August 29th, 2010, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100829090925/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/watch>

programmatically stitched together” through this viewer feature.¹¹²⁷ According to Terdiman, this “dynamic playback system” was possible “because users were able to give a thumbs up or thumbs down to any submitted clip” and, as a result, the *Star Wars Uncut* version of a *New Hope* was claimed to always be “the best possible version of itself.”¹¹²⁸ More specifically, this system would automatically play “the highest-rated rendition of each scene” and compile “those scenes on the fly, so the movie can change in real time depending on the ratings of users.”¹¹²⁹ These features of the *Star Wars Uncut* platform made the spectatorship of the *Star Wars: A New Hope* remake more dynamic. More importantly, however, they also strategically incorporated the input of participants in a manner that accorded them with a greater sense of ownership and authorial control over at least one version of the crowdsourced remake than the eventual Director's Cut where the selection of scenes was decided by Pugh and the project editor Aaron Valdez. This particular facet of the revised Web platform for the first iteration of *Star Wars Uncut* thus seemingly makes it a more collaborative project than *Life in a Day* in that participants in the project are afforded more control over its final form through their capacity to vote on submissions and directly affect the streaming process. Through its promise of greater inclusion and exposure, it would also function as another means to attract the additional participation of online users within the project and its successor *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*.

Star Wars Uncut's Organizers and their Channeling of the Crowd's Value

Nevertheless, as indicated above, a Director's Cut of the *Star Wars: A New Hope* project was constructed by Pugh and Valdez and released in January 2012.¹¹³⁰ This linear version is the incarnation of the project's first phase that has received the widest distribution and critical commentary. More importantly, it is now the sole version currently available to participants and the more dynamic web platform constructed for the project's first crowdsourced remake, now part of an ephemeral past, was replaced by a new website for the subsequent *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* portion of the project and its user submissions. While individual scenes by participants for the *New Hope* remake can still be found on the adopted video host Vimeo, the capacity to access

¹¹²⁷Casey Pugh, “We're Thrilled to Present the Uncut Movie...,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, August 17th, 2010, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/968186630/watch-star-wars-uncut>

¹¹²⁸Daniel Terdiman, “Star Wars Uncut Creators wow SXSW with Crowdsourcing Tales,” *CNET*, March 13th, 2011, <http://www.cnet.com/news/star-wars-uncut-creators-wow-sxsw-with-crowdsourcing-tales/>

¹¹²⁹Brian Stelter, “An Emmy for Rebuilding a Galaxy,” *New York Times*, August 27th, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/28/arts/television/28uncut.html?_r=0

¹¹³⁰“Star Wars Uncut: Director's Cut,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, January 20th, 2012, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/16173021139/star-wars-uncut-directors-cut>

them directly as a full collection or have them possibly included within a version of the project as a result of user votes on the *Star Wars Uncut* website is gone. This eventual result in combination with the privileging of the Director's Cut of the first *Star Wars Uncut* remake and Pugh as its guiding “director” once again accords him with a more powerful cultural status than the participating crowd. Consequently, he becomes the participant who stands to benefit the most from the exposure he gains through the project. The elevated position of author afforded to Pugh is even present within *Star Wars Uncut*'s own descriptions of itself as a “mashup remake of the original Star Wars movies” whose primary “brainchild” is Pugh.¹¹³¹ Furthermore, commentators like Ross McDonagh, in their own writing, would appropriate and continue this characterization of Pugh as the project's “brainchild.”¹¹³² In a later 2013 interview, he would reinforce his authorship over the project by professing that *Star Wars Uncut* “has always been an art project built by one person.”¹¹³³ Likewise, even Lipton and Tehranian are very quick to frame the initial organizer of the project, Pugh, as its “one central 'author,'” claiming the “identity of the author” to be “relatively clear despite the contributions by multiple filmmakers” via the crowdsourcing process.¹¹³⁴ In spite of the platform's attempt to include participants as collaborators by giving them some degree of control over the final form of *Star Wars Uncut* via user votes, its organizers are eventually framed as the true authors of the crowdsourced remake. Moreover, because they are part of the network of social actors who decided to eliminate the procedurally generated version of the project in order to move on to its second phase, their singular authorial power over the project's final form and the features of the platform on which participants create and access the productions of others is re-asserted and strengthened.

Moreover, as *Star Wars Uncut* evolved over the years, Pugh and other actors began to increasingly benefit from the relative position of control that organizers possessed over the platform and the project, even though the transformative remake had to be a non-profit venture from the outset in order to meet the few exceptions to copyright law and be protected from the intervention of the owners of the *Star Wars* franchise. For example, while the project needed to

¹¹³¹“About,” *Star Wars Uncut*, accessed Oct. 22nd, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/about>

¹¹³²Ross McDonagh, “May the Force be with You and you and you... Force is strong with shot-for-shot replica of classic,” *Metro* 1, January 24th, 2012, 3.

¹¹³³Casey Pugh, “Tribeca: Interview with Star Wars Uncut Creator Casey Pugh,” *Filmoria*, Interview by Lesley Coffin, April 18th, 2013, <http://www.filmoria.co.uk/2013/04/tribeca-interview-with-star-wars-uncut-creator-casey-pugh/>

¹¹³⁴Lipton and Tehranian, “Derivative Works 2.0.: Reconsidering Transformative Use in the Age of Crowdsourced Creation,” 434.

be non-commercial due to its appropriation of a proprietary cultural product, Pugh did ask participants to donate money to the project via the *Star Wars Uncut* website in order to help him pay for web hosting and promotional trips, costs that were then coming out of his “own pocket.”¹¹³⁵ Although the few donations offered did help allay these costs according to Pugh, the project lacked the financial resources that often shape crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* and, at one point, a crowdfunding campaign was even considered.¹¹³⁶ In September 2010, he would claim that the first incarnation of *Star Wars Uncut*, in spite of all the labour it amassed from fans to create and promote it, only cost him personally around \$1,500 in server costs and one trip to Los Angeles.¹¹³⁷ This low-cost labour benefited him enormously due to the exposure and promotion the project brought him as its supposed auteur and, evidently, it was also highly beneficial for *Star Wars'* content owners who became increasingly interested in the project during and after its first iteration. For example, for his second crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back*, Pugh declared that he was working more closely with the LucasFilm team members who manage the official *Star Wars* website, Starwars.com, in order “to help me out and do *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*.”¹¹³⁸ In another interview, he even stated that, in order to do a crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back*, he would need “some return value” in order to adequately cover costs.¹¹³⁹ Consequently, as part of the open call for the second phase of the project, this closer and beneficial relationship with the now Disney-owned LucasFilm would be promoted within a post on the official StarWars.com website itself where this newfound support was said to enable *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* to “extend its reach” and “involve fans on an even larger scale.,” thus supposedly rendering it more inclusive.¹¹⁴⁰ Ostensibly grounding this support

¹¹³⁵Casey Pugh, “This Project Has Gone Way Beyond My Expectations,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, Sept. 5th, 2009, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/180664010/this-project-has-gone-way-beyond-my-expectations>

¹¹³⁶Casey Pugh, “Casey Pugh: May the (crowd)Force be with you,” Interview with Matthew Liddy, *Big Interview*, October 23rd, 2009, <http://biginterview.org/post/220835534/casey-pugh-may-the-crowd-force-be-with-you> [site discontinued]

¹¹³⁷Casey Pugh, “Exclusive Interview with Casey Pugh, Producer of *Star Wars Uncut*,” *Maroon Weekly*, Interview by Chris Zebo, September 7th, 2010, <http://maroonweekly.com/exclusive-interview-with-emmy-award-winner-casey-pugh-creator-of-star-wars-uncut> [inactive]

¹¹³⁸Casey Pugh, “Emmy-Winning *Star Wars Uncut* Creator Casey Pugh – An Urlesque Interview,” Interview by Jay Hathaway, *Urlesque*, September 1st, 2010, accessed October 20th, 2014, <http://www.urlesque.com/2010/09/01/star-wars-uncut-casey-pugh-interview/> [site discontinued]

¹¹³⁹Casey Pugh, “Exclusive Interview with Casey Pugh, Producer of *Star Wars Uncut*,” *Maroon Weekly*, Interview by Chris Zebo, September 7th, 2010, <http://maroonweekly.com/exclusive-interview-with-emmy-award-winner-casey-pugh-creator-of-star-wars-uncut> [inactive]

¹¹⁴⁰“The *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*: Bigger and Better,” *StarWars.com*, October 23rd, 2012, <http://www.starwars.com/news/the-empire-strikes-back-uncut-bigger-and-better>

of *Star Wars Uncut*, according to Ivan Askwith, Lucasfilm’s Senior Director of Online, was the project's ability to “acknowledge that *Star Wars* isn’t just our story, but in a sense, belongs to everyone” and to give LucasFilm “a chance to put the spotlight back on the fans who keep *Star Wars* alive.”¹¹⁴¹ Furthermore, this posting on the website also represented this new partnership as helping Pugh “promote the project” at the Star Wars Celebration VI in August 2012 where he was invited by LucasFilm to unveil the project and a trailer for it hosted on the official Star Wars website.¹¹⁴² In addition to these proclaimed benefits, continuity with the more independent and fan-driven crowdsourced remake of *A New Hope*, however, is explicitly emphasized by the post, which reassures readers that the formula followed is the same and that “fans around the world” can access the *Star Wars Uncut* web platform and, as in the past, “claim 15-second scenes from the original film, then recreate them in whatever way they see fit.”¹¹⁴³ In addition, the talent release form for this iteration of the project even requires that participants acknowledge “that neither the Copyright Owner nor any of its affiliated entities is a sponsor of the ESB Uncut Project,” thus positioning *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* as independent from the influence of Disney and Lucasfilm and minimizing how it benefits these corporate entities by increasing the exposure of the *Star Wars* brand as a low-cost means of promotion and by being integrated within their emerging marketing strategies for the forthcoming trilogy.¹¹⁴⁴ Through all this posturing, LucasFilm positions itself as a neutral actor that is merely helping the completion of this second fan-driven incarnation of *Star Wars Uncut* and minimizes its own role as a project organizer shaping it alongside Pugh and his creative partners. It also avoids expressing the many promotional benefits that this partnership affords them and the *Star Wars* brand. Pugh himself reinforces the impression of continuity with the first phase of the project when he promises another Director's Cut to the participants of the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake.

However, deviating somewhat from the *New Hope* remake and its platform, he also promises the option to download all other recreated scenes directly via platform to create their own cut as well as another interactive playback system now enabling users to choose particular filters that sort the type of scenes – animated, live action, etc. – that will be screened as part of

¹¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹¹⁴²Ibid.

¹¹⁴³Ibid.

¹¹⁴⁴ "Talent Release," *StarWarsUncut.com*, August 31st, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, https://web.archive.org/web/20120831083020/http://www.starwarsuncut.com:80/talent_release

the film, resulting in a different version of the work with every distinct combination of inputs.¹¹⁴⁵ In addition, for this Director's Cut, Pugh gathered a “team of 20 Uncut superusers, film experts, and Star Wars aficionados” to function as judges tasked with the role of filtering the almost 2,000 submissions for *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* and selecting the best footage to be included.¹¹⁴⁶ By including several earlier participants who interacted substantially with the web platform for the first version of the *Star Wars Uncut* project into the selection process for the Director's Cut, *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* gestures towards a more inclusive and collaborative form of participation than other crowdsourced films where contributors have even less input on their final structure. Once again, through such promises and choices, Pugh is actively seeking to Nevertheless, the number of participants who are judges is minimal and contributors remain limited in how they can affect the project's form, the architecture of the online crowdsourcing platforms, and the conditions for participation and inclusion. For instance, in the rules and guidelines for *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*, many of the constraints placed on the crowdsourced remake of *A New Hope* persist and participants are asked to adhere to a 30 day deadline to upload a claimed scene, not include the original audio from the film, and avoid “sexually explicit videos or derogatory language” in order to make the remake accessible to child viewers, although, unlike the previous iteration, they are now explicitly requested to only upload original content with no “third party brands or content.”¹¹⁴⁷ While not very frequent, in the Director's Cut for the crowdsourced remake of *A New Hope*, third party content such as the aforementioned live action footage of *The Terminator* or *Nosferatu the Vampyre* were prominent in some reconstructed scenes. In one clip from the Director's Cut of the *A New Hope* remake, Seal's popular 1994 song "Kiss from a Rose" is juxtaposed with manipulated footage of Leia hugging Chewie in celebration from the original film following the protagonists' successful Death Star escape. Reflecting the effect of this new and more explicit rule stipulating the need for user submissions to be original material that possesses no third party content, the film version of the *Empire Strikes Back* incarnation of the remake project features much less similar appropriations. Although not a concrete restriction, participants to *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* were also

¹¹⁴⁵“The Empire Strikes Back Uncut: Bigger and Better,” *StarWars.com*, October 23rd, 2012, <http://www.starwars.com/news/the-empire-strikes-back-uncut-bigger-and-better>

¹¹⁴⁶Casey Pugh, “The Empire Uncut Director's Cut is Live!,” *StarWarsUncut.tumblr.com*, October 10th, 2014, accessed October 23rd, 2014, <http://starwarsuncut.tumblr.com/post/99684595372/empire-directors-cut>

¹¹⁴⁷“Rules – Empire Strikes Back: Uncut,” *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/rules>

encouraged to “shoot and upload your video in the highest quality possible” and, preferably, in the “16:9 format.”¹¹⁴⁸ As with *Life in a Day*, this desire for higher HD quality footage and formats discourages online users, who do not possess the hardware and software tools necessary to meet this visual standard, from participating. Some of these restrictions are externally imposed on participants by Pugh and his partners at LucasFilm in order to avoid being liable for copyright infringement. However, other limitations are seemingly designed to convert *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* into an accessible, inoffensive, and high quality promotional tool capable of invigorating fans' passion for the *Star Wars* franchise and generally drawing more attention to it and its current and future ancillary media offerings.

After its launch, the updated platform for the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* phase of the project, on its opening page scene list web pages, would, like prior versions, present potential users with another mosaic-like grid of scenes represented by image thumbnails, which now become animated gifs of the scenes when you hover over them, and marked with filtering tabs that allow users to view "Finished" scenes, "Incomplete" scenes, and scenes that are "Available" to be claimed as well as a search function that can retrieve scenes with certain corresponding tags attached to them.¹¹⁴⁹ Once online users click on a scene, they can interact with the tags associated with the scene and find other scenes featuring some of the same visual and story elements, characters, or locations and they can view some of the existing finished submissions for the scene.¹¹⁵⁰ After they choose to claim a scene that is available, they are reacquainted with the rules and guidelines for the project and then required to mark a checkbox indicating their consent to the terms and conditions set out within the platform's terms of service and the project's Talent Release Form before they can finally claim it.¹¹⁵¹ The gamification elements found in the Web platforms for the first version of the *Star Wars Uncut* project remain on this new web platform. The most productive participants and superusers who reconstructed the most scenes or ones containing several characters or who interacted with the platform's community were rewarded for some of these platform actions with user statuses ranging from “Padawan” and

¹¹⁴⁸ "Rules," *StarWarsUncut.com*, September 22nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120922142618/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/rules>

¹¹⁴⁹ "Empire," *StarWarsUncut.com*, September 22nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120922142650/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/empire>

¹¹⁵⁰ "Han Inspects the Hangar," *StarWarsUncut.com*, March 2nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121030225307/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/empire/11>

¹¹⁵¹ "Han Inspects the Hangar," *StarWarsUncut.com*, March 2nd, 2012, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121030225307/http://www.starwarsuncut.com/empire/11>

“Initiate” to “Jedi” and “Jedi Master” and image-based badges representing the film's characters akin to earlier versions of the *StarWarsUncut.com* platform, but now existing as potential profile images for participants. The strategic inclusion of such elements also had the discursive function of connecting participating fans to the narrative universe of *Star Wars* and re-awakening their affection for the original trilogy in the hope of attracting them to participate in the project and contribute their immaterial labour and its user-generated products in the form of content and the expanding network of affective relations with other fans that their collective online activity relating to it would create — an effect that would result in a low-cost form of promotion for the project and attract a wider amount of attention to it.

Nevertheless, when *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* was eventually released as a linear film in October 2014, it was still positioned as a project purely intended to celebrate the creativity of fans. This version of the crowdsourced remake enterprise even begins with a statement from Mary Franklin, Lucasfilm Senior Events and Fan Relations Lead, who explains their partnership with Pugh as reflecting the wish of the studio to witness and showcase "fan creativity," a desire that is meant to be seen as credible and reinforced by her subsequent announcement in this opening segment of the return of the Star Wars Fan Film Awards at Star Wars Celebration in Anaheim on April 16-19, 2015. In reality, its release coincided with the premiere of the animated television series *Star Wars: Rebels*, an addition to the franchise set five years before the events of the original trilogy. The crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back* along with this series thus served a promotional purpose by reminding fans of the original trilogy and promising them that the new films in the franchise, which are set after this trilogy and follow Disney's buyout of LucasFilm, will reclaim their spirit. A mere month later in 2014, the teaser trailer for the first installment of this new trilogy of *Star Wars* films, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), was released, accentuating this promotional buildup with its narrative of a return to the franchise's origins and, like the *Star Wars Uncut* project itself, seeking to channel fan nostalgia and affect for the original trilogy.¹¹⁵² The crowdsourced labour behind *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* was thus incorporated into the various phases of this marketing strategy, which emphasized that *Star Wars*'s new content owners were finally listening to the fans and undertaking a significant shift away from the despised prequel films directed by George Lucas. In this case, a supposedly non-

¹¹⁵²“Star Wars: The Force Awakens Teaser Trailer Premieres,” *BBC News*, November 28th, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-30243648>

profit crowdsourced remake's connection to the original media object enables its corporate owners to enter into a wider network of social actors – participants, project organizers, etc. – and interact with the latter's strategies and tactics in order to better fulfil their own promotional strategy. The crowdsourced remake's appropriation of copyrighted media properties, if they are not part of the public domain, renders them vulnerable to the powerful agency of corporations with their own designs to channel the pre-existing affect and labour of the participants involved as a means to promote their original content and the franchise to which it is attached. According to Klinger, the 'Re-enactors' of commemorative fan-made remakes are always “subtly involved in maintaining the source text's cultural circulation and continuity” and preserving “a film's place in cultural memory.”¹¹⁵³ In her view, “No matter the motive or impact, though, the re-enactment is always a form of commemoration – a call to remembrance that brings the original to mind and into the present.”¹¹⁵⁴ In a similar sense, both incarnations of *Star Wars Uncut*, being mostly produced by participants at a low cost with no real risk to Disney and LucasFilm, are highly beneficial to these corporations because both remakes serve to promote the *Star Wars* brand and remind readers, viewers, and participants of the past glory of the franchise in preparation for its revival as well as construct and spread the kind of affective atmosphere that will most strongly motivate citizens to consume more *Star Wars* media including the first film in the new trilogy: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

Thus, the use of crowdsourcing to remake an existing cultural object, which is exemplified by the *Star Wars Uncut* project, has often been adopted for promotional purposes by other projects in order to similarly increase the amount of attention and coverage directed towards a given property due to the unique status of the process itself and with the help of affect-driven fans who circulate its open call and participate in large enough numbers that the crowdsourced remake can not be avoided. These projects often explicitly used *Star Wars Uncut* as a successful blueprint for how to motivate a crowd of fans to participate and, through their affect-driven labour, indirectly draw more attention and promotion to the media object to be collectively remade. For instance, the creators of the U.S. version of the British television series *The Office* loosely used the template constructed by Pugh's project in order to incentivize its fans to create a crowdsourced fan remake or 'fanisode' of the Season 6 episode “Murder” in June 2010

¹¹⁵³Klinger, “Re-Enactment: Fans Performing Movie Scenes from the Stage to YouTube,” 196.

¹¹⁵⁴Klinger, “Re-Enactment: Fans Performing Movie Scenes from the Stage to YouTube,” 198.

following that season's finale as a means to draw more attention to the show prior to the new season's fall premiere.¹¹⁵⁵ Likewise, talk show host Conan O'Brien would also co-opt the format set forth by *Star Wars Uncut* and, in October 2012, announce his participatory project and contest planned for 2013 – Occupy Conan – a crowdsourced remake of a pre-existing episode from his TBS show *Conan* that was intended for broadcast. It was designed to exploit the novelty associated with crowdsourcing to draw more engagement with the late night program as well as more attention to the show itself and one of its key sponsors Volkswagen whose Volkswagen Beetle Convertible was awarded to the best submission as this contest's prize.¹¹⁵⁶ With the title Occupy Conan, the crowdsourced remake appropriated the rhetoric of revolution and protest adopted by the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 in order to frame the crowdsourcing process as transformative and empowering for fans and thus encourage their participation. Similarly, around the same time as *Star Wars Uncut*, a more dynamic crowdsourced remake project described as a “global collective art project” begun in 2010 was supposedly undertaken in order to create a “living portrait” of musician Johnny Cash by inviting fans to reconstruct and draw over the individual frames of a music video for his last studio recording “Ain't No Grave,” which was composed of documentary footage of Cash himself.¹¹⁵⁷ The 'living' component of the Johnny Cash Project lies in the persistence of the web platform whose interface accessibly allows users to draw over the videos' frames and, when the remake of the music video is played, new versions with different user contributions can be procedurally streamed. This dynamic stream of the video changes as more submissions are offered to the platform or if filters like “Highest Rated Frames” or “Random Frames” are selected. Although not explicitly framed as a promotional or commercial work, this project was designed to draw attention to the recent

¹¹⁵⁵Sandra Gonzalez, “‘The Office’ wants fans to create a ‘Fanisode.’ Dibs on the shootout scene,” *Entertainment Weekly*, June 10th, 2010, <http://www.ew.com/article/2010/06/10/the-office-fanisode>

¹¹⁵⁶See “Occupy Conan: The Fansourced Contest,” *TeamCoco*, accessed December 11th, 2015, <http://teamcoco.com/occupyconan>; “Promo: ‘Occupy Conan’ is Coming,” *TeamCoco*, video, October 17th, 2012, <http://teamcoco.com/video/tbs-occupy-promo>; “Conan Announces ‘Occupy Conan.’ - Conan on TBS,” *YouTube*, YouTube Video, 4:42, posted by “TeamCoco,” December 4th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5UYBD56CY0>; “The ‘Occupy Conan’ Submissions Have Begun – Conan on TBS,” *YouTube*, YouTube Video, 2:35, posted by “TeamCoco,” December 20th, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OqiuC4BCqM>; Joanne Ostrow, “Thursday Night: Occupy Conan,” *Denver Post*, January 31st, 2013, <http://blogs.denverpost.com/ostrow/2013/01/31/thursday-night-occupy-conan/12679/>; Natan Edelsburg, “Occupy Conan: Conan O’Brien and Team Coco to crowdsource a full episode,” *Ad Week*, Jan. 7th, 2013, <http://www.adweek.com/lostremote/occupy-conan-conan-obrien-and-team-coco-to-crowdsource-a-full-episode/37070>

¹¹⁵⁷Chris Milk, *A ‘living portrait’ of the Man in a Black*, “The Johnny Cash Project,” accessed on February 20th, 2015, <http://www.thejohnnycashproject.com/#/about>

release of a collection of original Cash material and song covers *American VI: Ain't No Grave*. In contrast to *The Office* fanisode or Occupy Conan, however, the lingering presence of the Johnny Cash Project and the continuing transformative capacity afforded by its non-linear format have created a distinct and dynamic cultural product that has increasingly become disconnected from its initially promotional purpose. Further exemplifying the influence of the crowdsourced remake format adopted by *Star Wars Uncut* and the ways in which it has come to be appropriated mostly for the benefit of corporate media owners rather than participants is the *Mad Men: The Fan Cut* project undertaken by KK Apple, a producer on *Empire Strikes Back Uncut*. This project would reproduce, in February 2015, the same crowdsourcing structure and rules used in the latter project to create a crowdsourced remake of the pilot of AMC's television show *Mad Men* in order to promote the broadcast of the show's final season.¹¹⁵⁸ In all these cases, the large connected crowds amassed to participate in these crowdsourced remakes ultimately produce an event through their immaterial labour that draws a significant amount of attention and affect to the cherished media objects that they are reproducing as well as increases the potential for the owners of these properties to commercially benefit from this manufactured experience. As a result, crowdsourced remakes tend to disproportionately benefit initiating organizers like Casey Pugh and KK Apple who, after their original successes with the format, were tasked to repeat their experiments more directly in service of media corporations like LucasFilm and AMC with *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* and *Mad Men: The Fan Cut*, respectively. These crowdsourcing projects thus served as calling cards for Pugh and Apple and gave them considerable exposure as individuals who can effectively guide a connected crowd into creating an attention-grabbing piece of media. Pugh and Wilkinson, two dominant creators behind the two *Star Wars Uncut* remakes, would even further benefit from all the attention obtained through the affect-driven labour of participants within these crowdsourced works by taking advantage of this exposure in order to promote their own distribution platform VHX, stating that the former remakes are “Brought to You by VHX” on the *Star Wars Uncut* website and prominently offering the two fan remakes via the VHX platform itself.¹¹⁵⁹

¹¹⁵⁸“Rules Summary,” *Mad Men Fan Cut*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.madmenfancut.com/rules> [site discontinued]; “FAQ,” *Mad Men Fan Cut*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.madmenfancut.com/faq> [site discontinued]; “Mad Men: The Fan Cut,” *Mad Men Fan Cut*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.madmenfancut.com> [site discontinued]

¹¹⁵⁹See “Empire Uncut,” *Star Wars Uncut*, accessed December 5th, 2015, <http://www.starwarsuncut.com/empire/>; “Star Wars Uncut,” *VHX*, accessed December 12th, 2015, <http://starwarsuncut.vhx.tv>

The organizers of crowdsourced remakes and the copyright owners of the appropriated copyrighted content are further empowered to the detriment of participants who submit content to crowdsourcing projects through the strategic deployment of the contractual agreements into which these contributors enter and the flexible control they afford to organizers over them and their work. For instance, within *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* and its closer situation within a network of corporate actors from the industry, contributors are disempowered when their participation necessitates their agreement to the terms set forth within a talent release form. For instance, despite the vision of *Star Wars Uncut* as a transformative and distinctive work, this release form strategically frames the work of participants as “fan fiction” and states that it is “is derived from and legally dependent upon the copyright of the Original Film, to which I have no rights, or the license or authorization to create derivative work.”¹¹⁶⁰ This framing of fan labour as 'derivative' rather than transformative reinforces the disempowerment of participants by preventing them from characterizing their work as fair use and consequently allowing it some degree of independence from the copyright enforcement of LucasFilm. Moreover, in spite of *Star Wars Uncut's* self-representation as a communal, fan-driven project, this release form also represents the voluntarily given participation of fans as “work made for hire for the benefit of the Copyright Owner.”¹¹⁶¹ The form even acknowledges the future possibility that crowdsourced labour could be determined to be a different status of work that comes with greater rights for participants: for example, that of employees rather than free contractors. The work of Schmidt detailed in the previous chapter has highlighted this debate over the status of crowdsourced work and how certain crowdsourcing platforms like CrowdFlower have even been subject to lawsuits by participants seeking greater compensation for their labour.¹¹⁶² Specifically, it accords the Copyright Owner of the original film the right of ownership over all the creations present within the crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back* regardless of the determined status of their work, stating to participants that, if their work:

....is determined not to be a work made for hire, it will be deemed and is hereby transferred and assigned exclusively and perpetually to the Copyright Owner by this

¹¹⁶⁰“Talent Release,” *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶¹“Talent Release,” *StarWarsUncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶² Florian Alexander Schmidt, “For a Few Dollars More: Class Action Against Crowdsourcing,” *Florianschmidt.co*, last modified on February 10th, 2013, accessed on February 15th, 2014, <http://florianalexanderschmidt.de/for-a-few-dollars-more/>

Release, together with all worldwide rights, titles and interests of every kind and nature now or hereafter known in My Work...¹¹⁶³

Aside from granting this power to Disney and LucasFilm, the release form also stipulates that:

....between the Producer and me, My Work shall be the sole property of the Producer, free from any claims by me or any other person; and the Producer shall have the exclusive right to copyright My Work in his/her name and to secure any and all renewals and extensions of such copyright throughout the world.¹¹⁶⁴

Along similar lines, this release grants the above Producer of the crowdsourcing project, a company titled Omnicut, Inc., which is wholly owned by Pugh, “an exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free irrevocable license in all rights, titles and interests of every kind and nature now or hereafter known, in the audiovisual production created by me (“My Work”) based on the Original Film in connection with the ESB Uncut Project.”¹¹⁶⁵ It also accords both the Copyright Owner and this Producer the right to:

... use, re-use, publish, and re-publish My Work in connection with the ESB Uncut Project or other projects and/or productions, and in connection with the advertising, publicizing, exhibiting and exploiting of the ESB Uncut Project, in whole or in part, in any language (subtitled, dubbed, or otherwise), by any and all means, media, devices, processes and technology, whether now or hereafter known or devised, in perpetuity, throughout the universe.¹¹⁶⁶

Through this contract, the Disney-owned LucasFilm and Pugh are accorded complete ownership over the creations of the participating crowd who receive no form of remuneration for their affective labour. Other recent crowdsourced remakes inspired by *Star Wars Uncut*, like *Mad Men: The Fan Cut* (2015) and *Scarface Redux* (2014) have very similar release forms and terms that distribute the same rights to the “Copyright Owner” and the “Producer.”¹¹⁶⁷ However, *Scarface Redux* differs from the *Mad Men* pilot remake in that its legal form accords most of these rights to the lead organizer of the crowdsourced remake and a statement on its website claims to exclude the copyright owner from any claim of ownership by arguing that its

¹¹⁶³“Talent Release,” StarWarsUncut, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶⁴“Talent Release,” StarWarsUncut, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶⁵“Talent Release,” StarWarsUncut, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶⁶“Talent Release,” StarWarsUncut, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/talent_release

¹¹⁶⁷ “Mad Men Fan Cut Release Form,” *Mad Men Fan Cut*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.madmenfancut.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/MMFanCutRelease.pdf> [site discontinued]; “Legal,” *Scarface Redux*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.scarfaceredux.com/legal/>; “Copyright Notices and Fair Use Statement,” *Scarface Redux*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.scarfaceredux.com/legal/docs/DMCA%20Page.pdf>

appropriation of *Scarface* (1983) is fair use due to its transformative and non-profit character.¹¹⁶⁸ Within the terms of service for *Empire Strikes Back Uncut's* Web platform, further control is wrested from its users as it stipulates that all “material you upload to our site will be considered non-confidential and non-proprietary, and we have the right to use, copy, distribute and disclose to third parties any such material for any purpose” and that the platform owners have the exclusive “right to remove any material or posting you make on our site.”¹¹⁶⁹ Through the project's talent release and the terms of service for *Empire Strikes Back Uncut's* Web platform, numerous contractual constraints are strategically imposed over participants and they significantly limit the degree of ownership and control that they possess over their content, even as similar conditions and rules provide the foundation for this very creative agency. Nevertheless, the decisions and strategies undertaken by both LucasFilm and project organizers within the relational network of social actors attached to the crowdsourced *Star Wars Uncut* remakes ultimately produce an asymmetrical relation of power between them and participants who, in spite of their affect-driven labour, have substantially less control over their final forms and how their contributions are featured within them. When writing about Lucasfilm's 2007 creation of the Star Wars Mashup platform intended to invite fans to remix *Star Wars* creative content using the online video editing technology constructed by the company Eyespot, Lawrence Lessig would similarly comment on how Lucasfilm's terms and condition for the users of the platform and the latter's architecture would accord them a disproportionate amount of control and power over the resulting user-generated content and how it is ultimately used while offering participants little in return.¹¹⁷⁰ In his view, within this platform, the fan "remixer is allowed to work, but the product of his work is not his," thus reducing him or her to becoming a "sharecropper of the digital age."¹¹⁷¹ While referencing Lessig's commentary, Schäfer himself would criticize the Star Wars Mashup editor, due to its many restrictions, for "extending the value of a proprietary resource through fans while at the same time denying these fans any form

¹¹⁶⁸“Legal,” *Scarface Redux*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.scarfaceredux.com/legal/>; “Copyright Notices and Fair Use Statement,” *Scarface Redux*, accessed July 1st, 2015, <http://www.scarfaceredux.com/legal/docs/DMCA%20Page.pdf>

¹¹⁶⁹“Terms of Service – Empire Strikes Back Uncut,” *Star Wars Uncut*, accessed October 20th, 2014, http://www.starwarsuncut.com/terms_of_service

¹¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Lessig, "LucasFilm's Phantom Menace," *Washington Post*, July 12, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/11/AR2007071101996.html>

¹¹⁷¹ Lawrence Lessig, "LucasFilm's Phantom Menace," *Washington Post*, July 12, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/11/AR2007071101996.html>

of authorial compensation and even freedom of creativity"¹¹⁷² He would even conclude that, once "corporations producing media texts learn that the activities of fans and users actually benefit their original products, and that they are easy to stimulate and to exploit, it's but a small step to grant users a certain degree of cultural freedom," but that, "in return, the creativity of users will be controlled, and all rights to commercial utilization will be reserved for the corporations."¹¹⁷³ In a sense, Lucasfilm's increasing role as a central partner within Pugh's *Star Wars Uncut* project, especially its *Empire Strikes Back* incarnation, exemplifies the continuation and extension of the more flexible strategic approach seen within the Star Wars Mashup platform when it comes to the control of fan appropriations of audiovisual elements from pre-existing media properties, which is seen within the transformative user-generated content of affect-driven fans. More importantly, it reproduces the same unequal power relationship with participating users as well as the similar lack of structural agency or deeper creative input for users that marked this earlier 2007 project and was criticized by Lessig and Schäfer.

In conclusion, through the particular flexible strategies of control and choices undertaken by their organizers to shape and guide the online participation of *Star Wars* fans, the crowdsourced remakes produced through Pugh's *Star Wars Uncut* project did encourage them to contribute their productive labour, but it did not radically empower them to be a substantial part of the media production process. While *Star Wars Uncut* and its Web platforms served as a foundation for the creative agency of the crowd's individual members, it was organizers like Pugh and the copyright owners of the *Star Wars* franchise who primarily benefited from the labour and affect of fans that was actively encouraged and primed by the project and its open call. Moreover, it was the project organizers who set the conditions for participation and inclusion and often situated Pugh as the work's dominant author to his benefit. It was these project managers in combination with Disney and LucasFilm employees who possessed the most control over the final form of both projects and their surrounding platforms while holding the power to integrate *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* into the promotional strategies of LucasFilm. Consequently, it was project organizers and media corporations that would accumulate the most attention and power during the project's campaign and its production. Furthermore, throughout the *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back* incarnations of the *Star Wars Uncut* project, a closer

¹¹⁷² Schäfer, "Participation Inside? User Activities between Design and Appropriation," 154.

¹¹⁷³ Schäfer, *Bastard Culture! How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production*, 148.

relationship with the copyright owners of the appropriated texts emerged and it gradually placed more constraints on the agency of organizers like Pugh and of participants to the *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* remake, even as it finally gives the latter input into the Director's Cut version of the project. For example, despite promises of download features intended to allow users to create their own versions of the crowdsourced remake of *Empire Strikes Back* or a more inclusive procedural system akin to that initially used for the *A New Hope* remake, the current platform for *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* fails to offer either option and the only version of the project presently available to view remains the Director's Cut. Presumably, the absence of these platform features was designed to limit and avoid unregulated and unpredictable appropriations of the two *Star Wars* films and the *Uncut* remakes that would run counter to the marketing strategies of LucasFilm and its curated vision of the franchise. The crowdsourced remakes of *A New Hope* and *Empire Strikes Back* both accord more control over all stages of the production process to the project organizers and copyright owners and construct asymmetrical power relations with participants that primarily benefit the interests of the former actors. In the end, these types of media crowdsourcing projects and the flexible apparatus of discursive, affective, and platform- and rules-based strategies they enact to invite, encourage, and manage the productive participation and labour of *Star Wars* fans within their constructed online platforms and then disempower them — like the global documentary mosaic genre analyzed in the preceding chapter — are additional symptoms of communicative capitalism's neoliberal paradigm and the apparatus of control which is emerging to support its expansion into the twenty first century ecosystem of user-generated media now thriving online.

The Lingering Agency and Constituent Power of the Participating Crowd

Despite the disempowered and constrained state of many participants within crowdsourcing media projects and the flexible modulation of their affect by their organizers, the contributors to *Star Wars Uncut* are not deterministically controlled by figures like Pugh or LucasFilm; instead, they are constantly negotiating and tactically engaging with the strategies and rules of the crowdsourcing platform. However, while it is essential that this lingering agency is recognized, its restricted character within both incarnations of the *Star Wars Uncut* project is evidence of the greater amount of power and control that is often acquired by project organizers, platform designers, and corporations as a result of overlapping interests or the different goals of each actor placing additional constraints on participants. Nevertheless, in contrast to the limited

autonomy of participants often afforded within crowdsourcing media projects like *Star Wars Uncut*, the unruly character of the crowd acknowledged by Bratich in the previous chapter can often resurface within such a project and resist its partial repression by some of the various socio-cultural actors involved in a crowdsourced production who channel it towards less destructive ends. The crowd and oppositional stance driving more fan-driven and-controlled crowdsourced works like *Our Footloose Remake* and *Our Robocop Remake* seemingly exemplify the more resistant and dynamic character of the crowd. For instance, referring to coverage by Julie Bosman in the *New York Times*,¹¹⁷⁴ Brabham has drawn attention to the concept of crowdslapping – a term signifying the resistance of a participating crowd within a crowdsourcing project to its intended goals – that emerged within a crowdsourcing media platform constructed by Chevrolet in order to encourage its users to use the provided video clips and music to create 30 second commercials for the 2007 Chevy Tahoe.¹¹⁷⁵ Rather than fulfill this task, the participating crowd, according to Howe, used the tools offered by the platform “to skewer everything from SUVs to Bush's environmental policy to, natch, the American automotive industry.”¹¹⁷⁶ Moreover, unlike the successful *Star Wars Uncut* project, attempts to channel the pre-existing affect of fans for a given media property in service of a crowdsourcing effort intended to reconstruct it and benefit the organizers and corporations behind it can also fail and backfire in a similar manner. For example, the recent use of crowdsourcing for the film adaptation and reboot of the 1980s Hasbro cartoon *Jem and the Holograms* (1985-1988), originally created by Christy Marx, would provide another instance of crowdslapping. This film project was criticized by writers like Kate Erlbland for attempting to channel and exploit the affective attachment of fans to the series in order to entice them into submitting user-generated content to the film production for little in return.¹¹⁷⁷ Specifically, average fans of the original cartoon series were asked to send music-related audition videos for roles in the supposedly collaborative film, but also, more importantly, to participate within it by: submitting footage of themselves declaring why they loved the original series and how Jem, the leading singer of the

¹¹⁷⁴Julie Bosman, “Chevy Tries a Write-Your-Own Ad Approach, and the Potshots Fly,” *The New York Times*, April 4th, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/04/business/media/04adco.html?_r=0

¹¹⁷⁵Brabham, “Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases,” 78-79.

¹¹⁷⁶Jeff Howe, “Neo Neologisms,” *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*, June 16th, 2006, http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com/cs/2006/06/neo_neologisms.html

¹¹⁷⁷ Kate Erlbland, “How the 'Jem and the Holograms' Movie Manipulates Its Biggest Fans,” *IndieWire*, October 22nd, 2015, <http://www.indiewire.com/article/how-the-jem-and-the-holograms-movie-manipulates-its-biggest-fans-20151022>

music band *The Holograms*, has inspired them to be their true selves; becoming extras within some of the film's concert scenes; and contributing concert poster designs as well as hand-written letters or notes similarly detailing how Jem has inspired them within their own lives.¹¹⁷⁸ However, in spite of the usual misleading promises to empower fans to collectively collaborate and participate in the production process, the organizers of the *Jem and the Holograms* reboot eventually released in 2015 would soon encounter the affect-driven criticism of fans.¹¹⁷⁹ This backlash was the product of a wide range of issues that fans and commentators had with the project including the mostly male composition of the producers – John M. Chu, Jason Blum, Scooter Braun, etc. – guiding this reinvention of a popular text cherished by female fans and the exclusion of the series' original creator Marx.¹¹⁸⁰ Contrary to the tendency of popular and academic crowdsourcing discourse to predominantly focus on the composition of the participating crowd required for a successful crowdsourcing enterprise — its diversity, the non-professional status of many of its members, its hybrid assortment of amateurs and professionals, etc. — critical fans of *Jem and the Holograms* would, however, redirect the focus of external observers to the composition of a project's lead organizers and the potentially negative and distorting influence that its mostly male members would have on a female-driven cultural property. Moreover, other fans would draw attention to the misleading narrative about organizer-fan collaboration and the token gestures of inclusion offered by the project by foregrounding how, despite the request for audition videos, most of the film's casting was seemingly already underway and its eventual leading actors were predominantly composed of professional performers rather than any of the auditioning fans and amateurs.¹¹⁸¹ This fervent dislike of the project also extended to intense criticism following the initial release of film's first trailer, which suggested a reimagining that had little in common with what female fans enjoyed in the series

¹¹⁷⁸ “Exclusive!! Jem and the Holograms Movie Announcement,” YouTube video, 2:45, posted by “Jerrica Benton,” March 20th, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzVnNVrunAE>; “Extras,” YouTube Video, 0:37, posted by “Jerrica Benton,” May 8th, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbF2rr_C-jo; and “#JEMTheMovie Needs Your Help!! Assignment #2,” YouTube Video, 2:22, posted by “Jerrica Benton,” April 11th, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IID9yg9hji8>.

¹¹⁷⁹ Kate Erlbland, “How the 'Jem and the Holograms' Movie Manipulates Its Biggest Fans,” IndieWire, October 22nd, 2015, <http://www.indiewire.com/article/how-the-jem-and-the-holograms-movie-manipulates-its-biggest-fans-20151022>

¹¹⁸⁰ Lakshine Sathiyathan, “WeWantChristy: Criticism over male-led remake of 'Jem and the Holograms,’” *CBC*, March 24th, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/yourcommunity/2014/03/wewantchristy-criticism-over-male-led-remake-of-jem-and-the-holograms.html>

¹¹⁸¹ “Jem the Movie Truly a Disaster,” *Bklynbarbie*, May 14th, 2014, <http://bklynbarbie.tumblr.com/post/85726414210/jem-the-movie-truly-a-disaster-i-have-been>

and effectively removed a lot of core narrative elements from it.¹¹⁸² This criticism was eventually bolstered by the film's release and its revelation of the substantive changes made to the original concept behind the animated television series in service of an empowerment narrative explicitly tied to Web 2.0 technologies that was so inclusive and homogeneous that it diluted the series' more specific focus on female empowerment.

In the final film, the majority of the sci-fi elements present within the original the series — the computer Synergy created by lead singer Jerrica Benton's deceased father with its capacity to produce three-dimensional holographic projections through technologically-altered mobile accessories like her earrings, thus allowing her to inhabit the holographic persona and alter ego known as "Jem" within the series' central girl group — are all absent and replaced by a hologram-projecting robot also created by her dead father and named 51N3RG.Y, which no longer has a key role in facilitating the series' original escapist fantasy involving Jerrica adopting the more liberating identity of "Jem," but is merely the messenger of a final inspirational message left behind by her father. Instead, in the film, the initially insecure Jerrica merely uses a costume and wig to inhabit this new persona and the central technological means by which she first acquires her fame as a lead singer is through her use of this alter ego within a video of a musical performance that then becomes a viral sensation on various social media platforms after her younger sister Kimber uploads onto YouTube. Web 2.0 platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr, due to the social interactivity they promulgate and the circulation of positive word of mouth they enable, are thus positioned at the beginning of the film as the main technologies that are empowering Jerrica and her group of bandmates. Reinforcing the more generalized narrative of participatory and collaborative empowerment attached to the Web 2.0 paradigm, the final concert sequence of the film has Jerrica explicitly telling her audience that her persona Jem is: "anybody who has something they want to express. And they need the courage to let themselves be heard. It's anyone with a dream who needs a way to make it happen. It's anybody who has something that they want to share with the world. It's you. It's him. It's her. We're all Jem."¹¹⁸³ Complementing this more all-encompassing theme of

¹¹⁸²Perry Carpenter, "Jem and the Holograms Trailer': Fans are Not Pleased, React on Twitter," *Inquisitr*, May 13th, 2015, <http://www.inquisitr.com/2087126/jem-and-the-holograms-trailer-fans-are-not-pleased-react-on-twitter/>; Madeline Boardman, "Jem and the Holograms Movie Trailer Debuts, Fans of the Original Cartoon Are Furious," *US Magazine*, May 13th, 2015, <http://www.usmagazine.com/entertainment/news/jem-and-the-holograms-movie-trailer-debuts-enrages-cartoon-fans-2015135>

¹¹⁸³ *Jem and the Holograms*. Directed by John M. Chu. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment,

individual empowerment and further linking it to social media technologies, the crowdsourced user videos requested by Chu and his fellow organizers did eventually become incorporated within the film as montage sequences composed of social media videos involving fans who either express their love of Jem and talk about how she has inspired them to be their true selves in their daily lives. Such montages highlighted their growing passion for Jem and her increasing popularity while reinforcing one of the film's dominant thematic messages about the need for people to find the courage to freely express themselves authentically as well as to inspire and empower others to do the same. Other user-generated videos— particular, those of participants dancing and clapping — were also used as audiovisual elements that are unexpectedly cross-cut with other narrative dramatic events like Jerrica and road manager for the band, Rio Raymond, taking control of record company Starlight Productions, so as to inject them with a supporting user-generated soundtrack suggesting a significant moment of change or resistance. In the former case, participants were asked to create videos telling the film project's organizers about how their love for the original Jem and how she inspired them without providing them with much information about how such user-generated content would be implemented in the final film. Ultimately, although these contributing fans were actually responding to the 1980s source material for this reboot within many of these submissions, the latter were opportunistically repurposed within the film to function as social media videos produced by the fictional fans of the new 2015 incarnation of Jem and her band, thus radically transforming their intended meaning. Although other participants were also included as extras within the concert scenes with some of the poster designs requested seemingly present within them, the participants to this partially crowdsourced reboot whose video submissions were included within the final film were also explicitly acknowledged within its end credits. However, due to the lack of transparency evinced by Chu and his co-organizers and their strategy to tap into the pre-existing affect of fans to elicit participation, such fans of the *Jem and the Holograms* were evidently exploited and mislead into contributing their immaterial labour for little extrinsic compensation to this partially crowdsourced production through the submission of user-generated video content and the indirect, low cost promotion and attention that their online activity brought to the film. In reality, the original source material revolving around female solidarity and creative power — which these fans thought they were helping to authentically reboot through their participation — was

2014. DVD.

converted and transformed into an unrecognizable and highly different film text, which promulgating the more expansive, utopian discourse of empowerment attached to the Web 2.0 paradigm with its inclusion of a wider range of potential subjects. This latter narrative is even reinforced by the film's considerable dependence on explicit moments of product placement related to social media platforms such as YouTube and mobile technology and hardware companies like Apple — the product of non-transparent financial deals with corporate sponsors whose benefits are not shared with these fan participants. However, in spite of this attempt to exploit the crowdsourcing process as a means to control the affect of fans and channel it to help with the film's production and promotion, the intensity of the affect-driven crowdslapping, which they performed in response to this reboot on social media and elsewhere, ultimately had a partial role in spreading a negative image of the film and contributing to its incredibly weak box office performance within North American theatres.¹¹⁸⁴

Fan affect can thus be a powerful resource for the organizers of crowdsourcing media projects and the copyright owners of the attached intellectual property. In other words, it can, to a degree, be encouraged, guided, and controlled, but its capture is never a complete guarantee and the agency of the online crowd's members always persists, whether as an outlet for the limited participatory opportunities for creative expression afforded by a crowdsourced remake project or, conversely, in rarer phenomena like crowdslapping. Even though crowdslapping exemplifies the constituent power of the online crowd's labour and further instances need to be unearthed within crowdsourcing scholarship, the above analysis of *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut* and the persistent power relations between the participating online crowd and the social, cultural, and economic actors who construct and initiated these crowdsourcing projects and their platforms offers a much needed corrective to the celebratory fantasy of empowerment and inclusion within much discourse about crowdsourcing. In addition, this analysis also foregrounds the corollary tendency within such projects to encourage, but also flexibly shape and control the productive agency and affect of participants to the primary benefit of platform owners, companies, and already established professionals and artists within the media industry.

¹¹⁸⁴Alex Stedman, "Jem and the Holograms' Pulled? Theatres Reduce Screens After Flop," *Variety*, November 10th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/jem-and-the-holograms-pulled-theaters-flop-1201637638/>

Conclusion

As illustrated within this dissertation's previous chapters and their case studies, a new neoliberal mode of capitalistic control — which is enforced by a media apparatus of increasingly flexible management strategies and centered on the channeling of the productive communicative capacities, labour, and products of networked users — has emerged within our connected information economy since the early 2000s. Even though the roots of this new more flexible form of capitalistic control and its reliance on the communication of connected citizens is informed by the post-Fordist and post-industrial shift in management practices since the 1960s towards the less coercive styles of management increasingly found within a neoliberal and networked information economy, it has become more dominant in the twenty first century due to the heightened connectivity and social interactions afforded by the growing popularization of media platforms, practices, and projects shaped by the Web 2.0 or Social Web paradigm. Instead of directly and restrictively managing the labour of creators or connected citizens to create the most desirable types of media content and data, this more flexible model of capitalistic control has been shown in the previous chapters to encourage the independent production and distribution of user-generated media by amateur citizens through the creation of open-ended Web platforms or projects. In fact, this new paradigm of control requires this participatory and collaborative agency from connected users in order to extract the significant amount of value and productivity it tends to produce and then convert it into profit. Thus, rather than disciplining these users into fixed roles as seen within past modes of industrial capitalism, this dissertation's chapters has demonstrated how, instead, this paradigm tries to compel them into inhabiting a hybrid, flexible, and valuable form of productive subjectivity that carries with it a greater degree of creative and tactical autonomy through the adoption of more inclusive and flexible management strategies and decisions involving Web 2.0-based online media platforms and projects. As a result, it echoes what Dean describes as a communicative mode of capitalism or the autonomist vision of the networked digital economy characterized by Terranova, Hardt, and Negri. More specifically, the dissertation's previous chapters illustrate how this now dominant mode of capitalistic control entails a media apparatus composed of a partially disciplinary network of discursive and non-discursive control strategies that jointly encourage, cultivate, and preserve this desired subjectivity in order to satisfy the capitalistic and proprietary interests of Web 2.0 platform and project owners and their related stakeholders *as well as* global

corporations from already established media industries like film, television, and video games. Furthermore, contrary to the autonomist narrative of a post-hegemonic order, this new neoliberal apparatus of flexible control has been revealed throughout the preceding chapters to often involve an integration of discursive and affective strategies designed to increase the online participation of relatively autonomous networked users and subsequently profit from the valuable byproducts of this voluntary activity. For instance, while partially exemplified by the reliance of online platforms and media crowdsourcing projects on the affectively charged and contagious utopian ideas often present within Web 2.0 discourse — which tends to idealistically promise, to average citizens, a radical form of empowerment through the democratization of media participation and collaboration — the strategic combination of discourse and affect found within this new capitalistic mode of control and the media apparatus that supports it also, as seen in the case of the *Star Wars Uncut* project, involves the exploitative stimulation of global fan affect through particular rhetorical strategies and choices. This latter strategy is yet another means to increase productive and valuable forms of online participatory activity for the benefit of various media corporations and professional creators.

Moreover, as detailed in this dissertation, the shifting network of decisions and strategies that tend to make up the above apparatus of control — while serving the capitalistic interests of Web 2.0 platforms, projects, and media actors — is always in a contingent relationship and in negotiation with the dynamic creative agency of online users and their participatory interactions and tactical actions. Through its political-economic and critical-theoretical analysis of this interplay between the discursive and non-discursive strategies and decisions tied to this media apparatus and the tactical participation of networked users, this dissertation's chapters have uncovered the various types of power relations and inequality that often emerge from such interactions. They have also unveiled how such relations of power and inequality tend to be masked by the strategic use of Web 2.0 discourse's most attractive utopian claims — a control strategy that is part of this apparatus and which, while serving this ideological purpose, is also designed to increase and guide the participatory creativity of online users. In all of the previous chapters, these asymmetrical relations of power — although they entail a more flexible relationship with labour — have also been shown to partially echo the top-down and centralized forms of control over creators and consumers seen within the production processes and marketing strategies of established mass media industries like film, television, and digital games.

Furthermore, the case study analyses found within these chapters have jointly countered Web 2.0 discourse's frequently idealistic vision of user-driven online media platforms as neutral, inclusive, and radically empowering foundations that enable users from all over the world to significantly collaborate and participate in the creative process on an equal plane with media corporations while also mutually benefiting from this increased collaboration and participation. They have also resisted the reductive celebration of participatory activity that has occasionally marked past and present research on media reception within the fields of digital media, fan, and cultural studies. Consequently, this dissertation has produced a more complicated political-economic portrait of the communication-centric capitalistic ecosystem that, since the start of the twenty first century, is increasingly being driven by the flexible control of user-generated content, data, and relationships, all of which are actively enabled and encouraged by Web 2.0-based online media platforms and projects.

Contributing to this more nuanced characterization of this emerging media environment and undercutting the more utopian claims of Web 2.0 discourse about social media platforms and crowdsourcing — which are part of the previously mentioned apparatus and its flexible control of a more autonomous mode of creative subjectivity — this dissertation's central case studies also reveal how individualistic and collaborative forms of participatory media practices driven by this productive user agency are still inextricably linked to established media industries from all over the world and constrained by them. Moreover, these practices and the flexible creative subjectivity of the users who undertake them are shaped by the above apparatus' discursive and non-discursive strategies of control. For instance, as demonstrated within the chapters of this dissertation's second and third sections, the rules, terms, conditions, interface design choices, monetization strategies, and affectively charged discourse adopted by Web 2.0 platforms and media crowdsourcing projects enable the participatory creative agency of users while also constraining it. More specifically, these chapters' case study analyses of various user-driven media practices on YouTube and media crowdsourcing projects reveal how this new apparatus of control includes, shapes, and channels the creative autonomy of users and their online products for profit and attention through: the adoption of automatic copyright enforcement software like YouTube's Content ID; the design of flexible architectural features within Web 2.0 platforms and projects intended to accumulate and monetize user activity; the deployment of rules, guidelines, and conditions with the same aim within these same spaces and within specific partnership or

sponsorship contracts. Consequently, the dissertation's case study analyses resist a totalizing narrative of complete capture and acknowledge the tactical agency still afforded to users by the strategies that typically compose this media apparatus while also recognizing their always present constituent power to resist them and create alternative spaces and practices. In spite of this reality, the preceding two sections within this dissertation have also highlighted how the degree of participation and collaboration afforded within Web 2.0 platforms, projects, and partnerships — along with the amount of financial empowerment accorded to online users for their participatory actions — can vary widely depending on the strategies and choices adopted by their owners, managers, and organizers. In some cases, as seen within the chapters on gameplay commentary and fanvid parody, online users can be substantially empowered as a result of their visible participation within this new communicative mode of neoliberal capitalism and the apparatus of control that drives it. Lastly, besides contributing this new knowledge about the political-economic character of a Web 2.0-based media ecosystem, the case study analyses contained within this dissertation's final two sections have also shed new light on the particular interactions of previously under-researched forms of user-driven media content and practices — such as fanvid parodies and gameplay commentary videos as well as specific media crowdsourcing genres — with communicative capitalism's new strategies of control and the various corporate interests that benefit from them within this environment.

Communicative Capitalism and its Continuing Control of Online Media Producers

In the years following the rise of the user-driven online media practices analyzed within this dissertation, asymmetrical relations of power and inequality have only persisted between the users who create media content for Web 2.0 platforms and projects and the capitalistic forces seeking to flexibly manage their productivity in order to better extract their value. Simultaneously, as already witnessed in the gameplay commentary chapter, similar power relations have occasionally begun to emerge between the prominent YouTube celebrities who have thrived within this media environment and the network of viewers and smaller independent creators surrounding them. Moreover, the degree of complicity and conflict from the users inhabiting this new communicative ecosystem has continued to vary considerably as does the amount of autonomy and value that they are afforded within it. Despite the positive impact of recent court case victories in the U.S. related to fair use, Canada's 2012 Copyright Modernization Act with its specific protections of parodic usages of media content, and beneficial changes made

to the monetization dispute process of YouTube's Content ID system, the creative users of platforms dedicated to the aggregation of social media or media crowdsourcing still lack significant amounts of control. In addition, they persist in having a tense and unequal relationship with these platforms' owners and the organizers of media crowdsourcing projects as well as with the corporations who own the rights to the media content they often appropriate. For instance, due to the monopoly that YouTube holds on the online distribution of amateur media and the non-profit status of their content, the creators of fanvid parody series addressed in this dissertation's second chapter are still vulnerable to the arbitrary effects of its newly altered Content ID system and have no greater control or direct input with regard to the platform's policy decisions about such architectural processes. Exemplifying this continued state of affairs, on April 4th 2017, Team Four Star's YouTube channel would again be subject via the Content ID system to numerous copyright claims by Toei Animation against a significantly large portion of the videos within its Dragon Ball Z Abridged series.¹¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, their parody episodes would soon re-appear a short while later on the channel and, during their absence, their own website, TeamFourStar.com, continued to provide an alternative distribution platform for their creative work. Nevertheless, in a follow-up video commenting on this recent encounter with YouTube's copyright enforcement and content identification system, TeamFourStar member Lanipator foregrounded the lack of control and power that users with little financial capital have over the policies and architectural features of the platform that restrictively affect them.¹¹⁸⁶ Similarly, because of the disproportionate power it accords to the media corporations or creators who put forward a claim or a copyright strike on a channel's user content, YouTube's copyright enforcement system, which is partly supported by automated software like Content ID, has also continued to negatively impact the work of gameplay commentators and constrain their activity. For instance, following earlier instances of copyright strikes by the Japanese branch of game company Atlus against commentators using footage from their games — strikes that were then reversed following communication with the company's U.S representatives¹¹⁸⁷ — in April 2017,

¹¹⁸⁵ "Dragon Ball Z Abridged Pulled! Copyright Strikes Again," YouTube video, 1:30, April 6th, 2017, posted by "TFS Gaming," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VijijawUYk>; Scott Frerichs (KaiserNeko), Twitter Post, April 4th, 2017, <https://twitter.com/KaiserNeko/status/849512615869116420>

¹¹⁸⁶ Nick Landis (Lanipator), "Dragon Ball Z Abridged Down! What Now?" YouTube video, 7:42, April 6, 2017, posted by "Lanipator," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XAQSR696kg>

¹¹⁸⁷ Patrick Klepek, "Atlus Keeps Hitting Tiny YouTube Channels with Copyright Strikes, Then Reversing Them," *Kotaku*, October 26th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/atlus-keeps-hitting-tiny-youtube-channels-with-copyrigh-1738751541>

Atlus released a video policy that threatened commentators with Content ID claims or a copyright strike if they created a video playthrough or Let's Play series of their new game *Persona 5* (2017) that goes past a specific point in its narrative.¹¹⁸⁸ Although this limit was extended to later in the game's story following criticism,¹¹⁸⁹ it still forced gameplay commentators like the group Super Best Friends into cancelling their Let's Play of the game due to the serious risk associated with a copyright strike on their channel.¹¹⁹⁰ Similar abuses of the power accorded to claimants by YouTube's copyright enforcement system have also been undertaken by companies to suppress videos criticizing their games, further disempowering gameplay commentators.¹¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, due to the high cost of hosting online video content and the lack of substantial alternative platforms that accord their users greater power and possess a similarly large viewership, amateur video creators who appropriate existing media are mostly stuck with YouTube. In addition, they rarely have the opportunity to substantially shape the architectural features and policy decisions of YouTube and other social media platforms or intermediaries — elements that are often shaped by their owners in order to accommodate the proprietary capitalistic interests of established media corporations or satisfy their desire for profit. Thus, because of their lingering vulnerability to the uncontrollable effects of such choices and the minimal input they have over them, creative online users continue to exist in an unequal power relationship with the owners and managers of Web 2.0 media platforms like YouTube.

Over the last two years, the comparative lack of power possessed by creative users on YouTube has only become more apparent due to the restrictive effects of the often sudden, unanticipated, and non-transparent changes that continue to be made with regard to MCN partnership contracts and the platform's architectural processes and policies. In a 2017 article for the gaming site *Polygon*, Michael Sawyer — known as the creator of the video-based Let's Play,

¹¹⁸⁸ "A Note on Persona 5 and Streaming," *Atlus USA*, April 4th, 2017, <http://atlus.com/note-persona-5-streaming/>

¹¹⁸⁹ "An Update on Persona 5 and Streaming," *Atlus USA*, April 26, 2017, <http://atlus.com/update-persona-5-streaming/>

¹¹⁹⁰ "Best Friends Play Persona 5 (Part 4/3) - LP Cancelled Reaction," YouTube video, 4:20, April 8th, 2017, posted by "TheSw1tcher," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV5xTXzE3vU>

¹¹⁹¹ Patrick Klepek, "Indie Developer Retaliates to Negative Video with YouTube Takedown," *Kotaku*, March 19th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/indie-developer-retaliates-to-negative-video-with-youtu-1692469143>; Patrick Klepek, "Angered Game Developer Sues Critic Jim Sterling for \$10 Million," *Kotaku*, March 17th, 2016, <http://kotaku.com/angered-game-developer-sues-game-critic-jim-sterling-fo-1765484317>; Wesley Yin-Poole, "Developer Hits Back at Claims His Steam Game Rips off Banjo-Kazooie and Yooka-Laylee," *Eurogamer*, February 27th, 2017, <http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2017-02-27-developer-slams-critics-of-new-steam-game-accused-of-ripping-off-banjo-kazooie-and-yooka-laylee>

Slowbeef — has even remarked on how YouTubers tend to "get frustrated with the system" because "rules" and processes on YouTube like its automated system for notifying subscribers of new user content "keep changing" and negatively impacting channels and their viewership numbers.¹¹⁹² The impact of such unexpected platform changes has only become further exacerbated in 2017 by Google's response to the recent consequences of its longstanding *laissez-faire* approach to platform processes like copyright enforcement, monetization, and content moderation — a seemingly neutral stance intended to enable the inclusion of more user-generated content and user engagement as well as to channel the revenue resulting from this increased activity. Following reports in the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Times* detailing YouTube's lack of action involving the placement of ads next to hate speech, pornography, and content in support of terrorism and describing the insensitive use of Nazi imagery and rhetoric by some of its most prominent user celebrities like gameplay commentator PewDiePie,¹¹⁹³ Google sought to appease the concerns of various UK and U.S. advertisers who began to boycott YouTube by making certain changes to the platform's architecture and distancing its brand image from the controversial content of past partners like PewDiePie.¹¹⁹⁴ For instance, after the Disney-owned MCN Maker Studios dropped PewDiePie as a partnered channel, Google removed him from its Google Preferred program, an ad sales platform that offers larger brands access to the most popular 'brand-safe' channels on YouTube.¹¹⁹⁵ More relevantly, however, from March to

¹¹⁹² Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "The Three Reasons YouTubers Keep Imploding, from a YouTuber," *Polygon*, February 21st, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/2017/2/21/14683942/pewdiepie-controversy-youtube-drama>

¹¹⁹³ For the initial reporting of such advertising-related platform issues, see Alexi Mostrous, "Big Brands Fund Terror Through Online Adverts," *The Times*, February 9th, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/big-brands-fund-terror-knnxfgb98>; Rolfe Winkler, Jack Nicas, and Ben Fritz, "Disney Severs Ties with YouTube Star PewdiePie after Anti-Semitic Posts," *Wall Street Journal*, February 13th, 2017, updated February 14th, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/disney-severs-ties-with-youtube-star-pewdiepie-after-anti-semitic-posts-1487034533>; and Jack Nicas, "Google's YouTube Has Continued Showing Brands' Ads with Racist and Other Objectionable Videos," *Wall Street Journal*, March 24th, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/googles-youtube-has-continued-showing-brands-ads-with-racist-and-other-objectionable-videos-1490380551>

¹¹⁹⁴ For examples of this growing rejection of YouTube by advertisers and brands, see Esha Valsh and Kate Holton, "Google Apologizes to Ad Clients for YouTube Content Fiasco," *Reuters*, March 20th, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-google-idUSKBN16R1T8>; Jessica Guynn, "AT & T, other U.S. advertisers quit Google, Youtube over Extremist Videos," *USA Today*, March 22nd, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2017/03/22/att-pulls-google-youtube-ads-over-offensive-content/99497194/>; Todd Spangler, "YouTube Hate-Speech Ad Fallout Continues," *Variety*, March 24th, 2017, <http://variety.com/2017/digital/news/youtube-hate-speech-advertising-ana-lyft-jpmorgan-1202015538/>; Olivia Solon, "Google's Bad Week: YouTube Loses Millions as Advertising Row Reaches US," *The Guardian*, March 25th, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/25/google-youtube-advertising-extremist-content-att-verizon>

¹¹⁹⁵ Rolfe Winkler, Jack Nicas, and Ben Fritz, "Disney Severs Ties with YouTube Star PewdiePie after Anti-Semitic Posts," *Wall Street Journal*, February 13th, 2017, updated February 14th, 2017,

April 2017, Google undertook a series of significant actions involving the YouTube platform: it altered the default settings for the automated removal of ads from less 'brand safe' YouTube content; it offered advertisers new tools to better manage their exclusion and inclusion; gave creators the ability to know about and appeal the ad-related demonetization of their videos more easily; and began to limit the monetization of videos to channels that have accrued 10, 000 lifetime views.¹¹⁹⁶ Consequently, although the removal of ads from YouTube videos with sexually suggestive material, violence, bad language, and controversial and sensitive subjects pre-existed the above changes,¹¹⁹⁷ some of the above changes resulted in the automated demonetization of a wide range of user content that was deemed to contain these elements and, as a result, made the arbitrary character of this process more publicly visible to users and others. Consequently, various types of game and gameplay commentators who tended to appropriate footage from more violent games began to fear the negative impact of such uncontrollable changes on their ability to convert their labour into revenue and, in one example, the monetization of YouTube videos appropriating and commentating over promotional footage from the war-based game *Call of Duty: World War II* (2017) was automatically disabled seemingly as a result of the keyword and tag "war" being found within their metadata.¹¹⁹⁸

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/disney-severs-ties-with-youtube-star-pewdiepie-after-anti-semitic-posts-1487034533>; Todd Spangler, "YouTube Cancels PewDiePie Show, Pulls Channel from Ad Program," *Variety*, February 14th, 2017, <http://variety.com/2017/digital/news/youtube-cancels-pewdiepie-pulls-ads-death-to-jews-1201987810/>

¹¹⁹⁶ For descriptions of these changes to its advertising-related monetization systems, see Philipp Schindler, "Expanded Safeguards for Advertisers," *Google Blog*, March 21st, 2017, <https://blog.google/topics/ads/expanded-safeguards-for-advertisers/>; "Strengthening YouTube for Advertisers and Creators," March 20th, 2017, <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2017/03/strengthening-youtube-for-advertisers.html>; Ariel Bardin, "YouTube Creator Blog: Introducing Expanded YouTube Partner Program Safeguards to Protect Creators," *Google Blog*, April 6th, 2017, <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2017/04/introducing-expanded-youtube-partner.html>

¹¹⁹⁷ To understand Google's policy on demonetization and its own list of content that is not advertiser-friendly as well as the reaction of users once they became more aware of its existence, see "Advertiser-Friendly Content Guidelines: YouTube Help," *Google*, accessed April 15th, 2017,

<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6162278>; Internet Creators Guild, "YouTube De-Monetization Explained," *Medium*, Sept. 2, 2016, <https://medium.com/internet-creators-guild/youtube-de-monetization-explained-44464f902a22>; Fruzina Eordogh, "Making Sense of YouTube's Great Demonetization Controversy of 2016," *Forbes*, Sept. 2nd, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/fruzsinacordogh/2016/09/02/making-sense-of-youtubes-great-demonetization-controversy-of-2016/#154d65b6ca90>

¹¹⁹⁸ For examples of the effects of these changes on gameplay commentators, see Cecilia D'Anastasio, "YouTubers Say They Can't Make Money Covering Call of Duty: WWII," *Kotaku*, May 3rd, 2017, <http://kotaku.com/youtubers-say-they-cant-make-money-covering-call-of-dut-1794884320>; Cecilia D'Anastasio, "With Destiny 2 Coming, Destiny YouTubers Fear Losing Money to YouTube's Ad Bots," *Kotaku*, August 28th, 2017, <https://kotaku.com/with-destiny-2-coming-destiny-youtubers-fear-losing-mo-1798508562>; Gita Jackson, "YouTube Latest Advertising Changes Have People Worried About Money," *Kotaku*, March 31st, 2017, <http://kotaku.com/youtubes-latest-advertising-changes-have-people-worried-1793912694>; Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "Why YouTubers Are Losing So Much Ad Money (And How They Can Survive the Crunch)," *Polygon*, May 10th, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/2017/5/10/15609660/youtube-youtuber-ad-money-google>

Similarly impacted by this widespread automated demonetization of user-generated content and the advertiser boycott, the channels of many amateur user creators including Slowbeef began to experience a sudden decrease in ad revenue.¹¹⁹⁹ Other gameplay commentators like PewDiePie, CaptainSparklez, and The RPGMinx have also expressed worry about this change's effects and criticized the arbitrary and flawed character of YouTube's automated demonetization system while commentator TotalBiscuit has specifically criticized the platform's lack of transparency when it comes to the more invisible elements of such processes and policy choices.¹²⁰⁰ Undermining its self-cultivated utopian narrative of inclusivity and amateur empowerment, the heavily automated character and negative effects of YouTube's predominantly automated demonetization process, like Content ID, would similarly foreground the lack of substantive control that its users hold over some of the architectural changes and policy decisions that affect them. Simultaneously, it would also highlight how the platform could potentially and arbitrarily exclude users from the financial empowerment that can come with monetization if they addressed and engaged with more controversial subjects within their videos. However, as already

¹¹⁹⁹ See Michael Sawyer (Slowbeef), "Why YouTubers Are Losing So Much Ad Money (And How They Can Survive the Crunch)," *Polygon*, May 10th, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/2017/5/10/15609660/youtube-youtuber-ad-money-google>; For other reporting on the effects of these changes to YouTube's demonetization process, see Amanda Hess, "How YouTube's Shifting Algorithms Hurt Independent Media," *The New York Times*, April 17th, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/arts/youtube-broadcasters-algorithm-ads.html>; Garrett Sloane, "As YouTube Tinkers with its Ad Formula, Its Stars See their Videos Lose Money," *Ad Age*, March 30th, 2017, <http://adage.com/article/digital/youtube-feels-ad-squeeze-creators/308489/>; Tess Townsend, "YouTube Creators Have Complained About Declines in Ad Revenue," *Recode*, March 30th, 2017, <https://www.recode.net/2017/3/30/15128654/youtube-creators-revenue-drop-brand-safety-controversy>; Olivia Solon, "'I can't Trust YouTube any More': Creators Speak Out in Google Advertising Row," *The Guardian*, March 21st, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/21/youtube-google-advertising-policies-controversial-content>; Davey Alba, "YouTube's Ad Problems Finally Blow Up in Google's Face," *Wired*, March 25th, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2017/03/youtubes-ad-problems-finally-blow-googles-face/>; Laura Sydell, "Online Video Producers Caught in Struggle Between Advertisers and YouTube," *NPR*, April 14th, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/04/14/523895647/online-video-producers-caught-in-struggle-between-advertisers-and-youtube>

¹²⁰⁰ See Gita Jackson, "YouTube Latest Advertising Changes Have People Worried About Money," *Kotaku*, March 31st, 2017, <http://kotaku.com/youtubes-latest-advertising-changes-have-people-worried-1793912694>; Garrett Sloane, "New YouTube Rules Restrict Ads to Vetted Channels as PewDiePie Declares The 'Adpocalypse,'" *Ad Age*, April 6th, 2017, <http://adage.com/article/digital/pewdiepie-declares-adpocalypse-youtube-makes-rules/308591/>; Captain Sparklez, "The YouTube Adpocalypse?," YouTube video, 18:08, April 23rd, 2017, posted by "CaptainSparklez," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAGCEhRqall>; TheRPGMinx, "My Thoughts on the YouTube Adpocalypse," YouTube video, 11:25, March 20th, 2017, posted by "TheRPGMinx," [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ_Hb3x9nZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ_Hb3x9nZQ;); and John Bain (Totalbiscuit), "H3H3 Productions and the State of YouTube Advertising," Soundcloud Audio, 43: 54, April 25th, 2017, posted by "TotalBiscuit," <https://soundcloud.com/totalbiscuit/h3h3-productions-and-the-state-of-youtube-advertising>

¹²⁰⁰ Patrick Klepek, "Atlas Keeps Hitting Tiny YouTube Channels with Copyright Strikes, Then Reversing Them," *Kotaku*, October 26th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/atlas-keeps-hitting-tiny-youtube-channels-with-copyrigh-1738751541>

argued in this dissertation, such automated systems exist as a necessary compromise between YouTube's genuine wish for a relatively inclusive platform full of monetizable media content and the need to appease the capitalistic interests of the media corporations and brands whose continued advertising and partnerships it also requires. The necessity of such partly automated systems and the restrictive effects they produce jointly undermine the utopian claims about the democratization of participation and the empowerment of amateur creativity that are a part of Web 2.0 discourse and YouTube's own appropriation of it. Beyond such systems, YouTube creators also continue to be disempowered due to the lack of control they possess within their partnerships with MCNs and their lingering vulnerability to the unexpected effects of the occasionally radical changes made to these contractual relationships. Exemplifying this lack of control recently in 2017, many gameplay commentators were abruptly removed from Maker Studios' partner network when the MCN severed the contracts of over 55,000 of its partnered creators.¹²⁰¹ Even though many of these former partners viewed this turn of events as a form of liberation due to the constraints and the exploitative exchanges of value associated with many MCN partnership contracts,¹²⁰² by being arbitrarily cast outside of an MCN network, they lost the higher paying ads and sponsorship deals as well as the partial protection from Content ID and copyright strikes that could come with partnerships with MCNS like Maker. Nevertheless, akin to the vulnerability exposed by the impact of Google's own decisions on users, the lack of control possessed by the partnered users associated with such MCNs is further evidence of how the media practices and income of online users like gameplay commentators continue to be unexpectedly impacted by the diverging interests and decisions of corporate entities connected to YouTube.

Aside from the disempowering effects and constraints that are often associated with the related strategies and decisions of Google and MCNs to cultivate a network or platform that includes larger quantities of monetizable user-generated content while appeasing the interests of other media corporations — strategies that are part of the wider media apparatus of inclusion and

¹²⁰¹ Todd Spangler, "Disney's Maker Studios Set for Round of Big Layoffs," *Variety*, February 15th, 2017, <http://variety.com/2017/digital/news/maker-2017-layoffs-disney-1201989473/>; Julia Alexander, "Report: Disney's Maker Studios Cutting Support for more than 55, 000 YouTubers," *Polygon*, February 23rd, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/2017/2/23/14717408/maker-studios-disney-youtube-pewdiepie>; Ben Fritz, "Walt Disney Lays Off About 80 from Maker Studios," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23rd, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/walt-disney-co-lays-off-about-80-from-maker-studios-1487881606>

¹²⁰² Cecilia, D'Anastasio, "Some YouTubers Are Overjoyed that Maker Studios is Firing Them," *Kotaku*, March 1st, 2017, <http://kotaku.com/some-youtubers-are-overjoyed-that-maker-studios-is-firi-1792854530>

flexible control supporting communicative capitalism and the interests benefiting from it — Google has started to build on initial platform ventures like YouTube Gaming and continued to develop other strategies intended to expand the inclusive presence of user-generated gameplay commentary on the platform. All of these decisions are designed to further convert the affective relationships and viewership, which gameplay commentary produces, into a valuable form of profit. For example, borrowing the paid subscription feature from rival Twitch, in October 2015, YouTube started to offer a select amount of livestreaming users, particularly gameplay commentators, the ability to offer monthly "sponsorships" of 4.99 \$ to their audiences in exchange for symbolic perks like a "live chat badge" or "access to exclusive chat sessions."¹²⁰³ Afterwards, it also created a new funding option for livestreaming creators. This option is titled Super Chat and it parallels Twitch's 'Cheering' monetization system with its sale of Bits — animated emoticons tied to highlighted chat messages of support or Cheers — in exchange for gamified symbolic rewards like chat badges.¹²⁰⁴ This growing attempt to convert the deep affect and emotional relationships produced and transmitted by the seemingly unmediated performances of gameplay commentators into profit also manifests itself through the continued interest of Google and game companies like Electronic Arts in sponsored content, which is independently produced by YouTube-based gaming commentators and involves the captured gameplay performance of recent or upcoming commercial video games.¹²⁰⁵ YouTube and media corporations' flexible management and profit-driven channeling of these users' affective labour thus remains a core strategy of control within the wider media apparatus supporting communicative capitalism.

Media Crowdsourcing Projects and the Ongoing Disempowerment of their Crowds

This strategy of encouraging and inclusively incorporating the frequently affect-driven labour and products of online users with the intention of potentially profiting from them also persists within more collaborative forms of Web 2.0-based participatory media production such as media crowdsourcing. For instance, still promising substantive forms of inclusion and

¹²⁰³ Barbara McDonald, "Gamers and Streamers - A Winner is You," *Google Blog*, October 15th, 2015, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2015/10/gamers-and-streamers-winner-is-you.html>

¹²⁰⁴ Barbara MacDonald, "Can We Chat? Hello Super Chat!," *Google Blog*, January 12th, 2017, <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2017/01/can-we-chat-hello-super-chat.html>

¹²⁰⁵ "Paid Product Placements and Endorsements," *Google*, last updated October 4th, 2016, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/154235?hl=en>; Julia Alexander, "EA Puts Influencers in Check with Disclosure Rules for Sponsored Content," *Polygon*, November 16th, 2016, <https://www.polygon.com/2016/11/16/13655180/ea-sponsored-content-youtube-twitch-disclosure>

empowering forms of creative participation and communal membership for contributing users, various subsequent media crowdsourcing projects licensing the global documentary mosaic format popularized by YouTube's *Life in a Day* have, in recent years, continued to emerge within countries like Italy, Canada, Spain, Germany, Britain, and India — the latter two being produced in close coordination with YouTube and Ridley Scott once again.¹²⁰⁶ A similar crowdsourcing format has even begun to be adopted by Park Chan-Kyong and Park Chan-Wook's crowdsourced and Seoul government-sponsored film *Bitter, Sweet, Seoul* (2014) and by the One Day on Earth Organization's *Your Day. Your City. Your Future* (2014) project. Both documentary projects seek to collect user-submitted footage from citizens who are passionate about their cities in order to represent diverse perspectives on them and document stories about them while, in the One Day on Earth Organization's enterprise, seeking to encourage users to investigate specific questions about the current problems affecting a select number of American cities and then offer potential solutions to them.¹²⁰⁷ Although these latter projects are less driven by commercial profit than *Life in a Day*'s successors — a fact which minimizes the degree of exploitation involved — similar promises of inclusion and empowerment accompany them. More importantly, the participants within these projects ultimately still possessed very little control over their final form and goals, nor did they receive substantive extrinsic forms of compensation for their participation aside from a few physical rewards offered to select winners in the case of *Bitter, Sweet, Seoul*. In addition, as seen with the partially crowdsourced film project *Jem and the Holograms* (2015) addressed in the previous chapter, other media crowdsourcing projects have similarly exploited the pre-existing affect of the fans of specific properties or artists in order to obtain a cheap source of participatory labour and privately capture its value for the commercial

¹²⁰⁶ Charlotte Moore, "Britain in a Day: Creating a Time Capsule for Future Generations," BBC Blog, November 8th, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/tv/2011/11/britain-in-a-day.shtml>; Nick Vivarelli, "Italy to Get User-Generated 'Italy in a Day,' Salvatores to Direct," *Variety*, September 26th, 2013, <http://variety.com/2013/digital/global/italy-to-get-user-generated-italy-in-a-day-salvatores-to-direct-1200669650/>; Nick Vivarelli, "Israel, Germany, and France Join Ridley Scott's 'Life in a Day' Format," *Variety*, September 2nd, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/israel-germany-france-join-ridley-scotts-life-in-a-day-format-exclusive-1201295900/>; Naman Ramachandran, "Google, Ridley Scott, Anurag Kashyap Team Up for 'India in a Day,'" *Variety*, October 1st, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/asia/google-ridley-scott-anurag-kashyap-team-for-india-in-a-day-1201606860/>; and "Canada in a Day," *Canadainaday.ca*, accessed May 15th, 2017, <https://canadainaday.ca>

¹²⁰⁷ "Bitter, Sweet, Seoul," *www.ParkChan-Kyong.com*, accessed May 15th, 2017, http://www.parkchankyong.com/bitter-sweet-seoul_film; Emerson Rosenthal, "'One Day On Earth' Invites YOU To Join A Nationwide Documentary Effort," *Vice*, April 24th, 2014, https://creators.vice.com/en_us/article/one-day-on-earth-invites-you-to-join-a-global-documentary-effort; "YourDay.Your City. Your Future," *Yourdayyourcity.org*, accessed May 15th, 2017, <http://yourdayyourcity.org>

benefit of their owners and initiating organizers. For instance, in late 2015, crowdsourcing as a practice was adopted by film company EuropaCorp in partnership with Yahoo Style within a crowdsourcing competition seeking to collect costume designs from users for well-known genre director Luc Besson and his film adaptation of the popular French graphic novel series *Valérian and Laureline* (1967-2010), *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (2017). The campaign's open call would subtly rely on the affective nostalgia of potential participants for this comic book series, but also, more prominently, for the past sci-fi and genre work of Besson himself, particularly his film *The Fifth Element* (1997).¹²⁰⁸ For the 20 participants whose designs are selected, they are promised 1,000 \$ each and the exposure acquired via the inclusion of their designs within the final film; interestingly, however, the contest's rules requires participants to waive the pursuit of equitable relief if designs similar or identical to their own are used by its organizers in the film, thus potentially giving them the license to use such designs without offering a reward or some form of compensation to their creators.¹²⁰⁹ Consequently, the unequal power relationships and inequality that resulted from the strategies of control adopted and embodied by media crowdsourcing projects like *Life in a Day* and *Star Wars Uncut* along with those strategies themselves — especially, the deliberate exploitation of fan affect — have only persisted in recent years within other crowdsourcing-driven media enterprises.

The Constituent Potential and Agency of the Affect-driven Labour of Online Users

However, because the capitalistic strategies of flexible control adopted by media crowdsourcing projects necessitate that the tactical agency of online users be preserved and the frequently affective and relational character of their productive actions lends them a contingent quality, they are never able to fully capture the constituent potential of this creativity and their labour to: oppose and resist these strategies; cultivate new and different practices, media, and spaces in response to them; and, lastly, pressure Web 2.0 media platforms into changing their platform features. For instance, when TeamFourStar and Billany's alternative online distribution

¹²⁰⁸ Elsa Keslassy, "EuropaCorp, Yahoo Style Launch Costume Design Contest for 'Valerian'," *Variety*, October 7th, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/europacorp-yahoo-style-launch-costume-design-contest-for-valerian-1201612324/>; "Valerian: #DesignForValerian Costume Contest," YouTube video, 2:18, Oct. 7th, 2015, posted by "EuropaCorpUS," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qSGDjCROU4>

¹²⁰⁹ "Valerian: #DesignForValerian Costume Contest," YouTube video, 2:18, Oct. 7th, 2015, posted by "EuropaCorpUS," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qSGDjCROU4>; "Design a Costume for Luc Besson's Epic Science Fiction Film," *Talenthouse*, accessed May 15th, 2017, <https://www.talenthouse.com/i/design-for-valerian>; "Creative Invite for Design a Costume for Luc Besson's Epic Science Fiction Film," *Cloudinary*, accessed May 17th, 2017, <https://res.cloudinary.com/talenthouse/image/upload/v1/invites/myvxxvowb03jqssfgehjh>, pg. 12.

platform, in Spring 2017, lost the primary video hosting service it had relied upon due to their MCN partner Screenwave Media's decision to sever its own partnership with the JW Player,¹²¹⁰ it was the tactical agency and affective drive of TeamFour Star and Billany along with the love of their fans that would compel them to seek other means of circulating their work and then transfer their website's hosting of *Dragon Ball Z Abridged* and *Yu-Gi-Oh Abridged* to the new social media platform Vid.Me. As demonstrated by this unexpected change, amateur video makers like gameplay commentators and fanvid parody creators who rely on the appropriation of existing media properties and distribute their often transformative content on the Internet frequently experience a lack of control when it comes to the underlying structural affordances and features offered by social media platforms and online hosting intermediaries like YouTube. Nevertheless, their affective attachment to these media properties and to their own work as well as the tactical agency and constituent power that their creative labour possesses within this networked media ecosystem ultimately enable them to find, preserve, and create alternative distribution platforms that provide them greater independence from the influence of some of the more restrictive and profit-driven control strategies present on YouTube. This persistent type of affective drive and constituent creative autonomy — which motivates and informs the immaterial and digital labour of these creators and their tendency to tactically resist the above apparatus of control — is not limited to finding alternative means of distributing their work. It also motivates these creators into constructing independent spaces where they can cultivate another culture of production with different values to those privileged on profit-driven Web 2.0-based media platforms and projects and to the commercial values that predominantly tend to drive their control and monetization strategies. For instance, operating under an entirely different and more communal system of valuation detached from the pursuit of a large amount of views encouraged by YouTube's architecture, a member of Something Awful's Let's Play community originally named Kamoc — more recently going by the twitter name "bobvids" — has founded a new forum-based website named Let's Play Zone dedicated to collaboratively creating high quality YouTube-based Let's Plays "without worrying about SEO and clickthrough ratios" or constantly thinking about increasing your "brand."¹²¹¹ Although YouTube remains the primary location for

¹²¹⁰ For an explanation of the effect of this sudden and under-reported decision by Screenwave Media on amateur creators, see Lewis Lovhaug (Linkara), "Player Changeover. Again," *Atopthefourthwall.com*, April 25th, 2017, <http://atopthefourthwall.com/player-changeover-again/>

¹²¹¹ Bob, comment posted on "Welcome to the LP Calzone - Eat (read) me," *Let's Play Zone* Site Feedback Forum,

the resulting Let's Plays produced within this site's forum environment, the gameplay commentary video series ultimately created and hosted there are not wholly shaped and constrained by the platform's encouragement of larger quantities of video content and high viewership or subscriber numbers. Consequently, by cultivating a space with radically different values than those encouraged by YouTube's architectural affordances and discursive strategies, the Let's Plays produced within this alternative forum environment can be more creative in character. More thought, planning, and time can go into their production in order to create a media object that is more culturally valuable and of higher quality than the rapidly created and seemingly more disposable gameplay commentary videos that often populate Google's platform. As exemplified by this case and TeamFourStar's drive to create an alternative space where their viewers can access their content, the relative degree of tactical and creative autonomy embodied by the digital labour of YouTube-based fanvid parody creators and gameplay commentators retains its constituent potential to create new spaces for media distribution and production — systems which function under less exclusively profit-driven systems of value. Moreover, as illustrated by the previously addressed movement by YouTube creators like TeamFourStar to influence and pressure YouTube into changing its approach to user-generated content relying on the fair use exception, online users also still have the constituent power to pressure social media platforms to change automated systems like Content ID or even resist their functioning. Exemplifying the latter, game critic and gameplay commentator Jim Sterling has disrupted the Content ID system through the tactical insertion of footage within his videos from numerous game properties owned by several different publishers known to aggressively enforce their copyright ownership via the system — publishers like Nintendo, Rockstar Games, and Konami. This tactic creates a "copyright deadlock" that often prevents the monetization of such videos by any copyright holder due to the competing decisions of each within the Content ID system to monetize or block uses of their media properties.¹²¹² As previously seen with the resistance of

comment posted on January 29th, 2017, <https://www.lp.zone/t/rotating-light-welcome-to-the-lp-calzone-eat-read-me/35>

¹²¹² For an illustration of the tactic in action, see Jim Sterling, "Newtendo (The Jimquisition)," YouTube video, 10:37, April 27th, 2016, posted by "Jim Sterling,"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w2RMBrmTsk&feature=player_embedded; For the subsequent reporting on the unusual tactic within and outside the game industry, see Patricia Hernandez, "Game Critic Uses Brilliant Workaround for YouTube's Copyright Bullshit," *Kotaku*, April 27th, 2016, <http://kotaku.com/game-critic-uses-brilliant-workaround-for-youtubes-copy-1773452452>; Kevin Murnane, "This Critic Used YouTube's Copyright System to Short Circuit YouTube's Copyright System," *Forbes*, April 29th, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinmurnane/2016/04/29/this-critic-used-youtubes-copyright-system-to-short-circuit->

female fans to the crowdsourcing campaign for the *Jem and the Holograms* film, such tactical resistance to the apparatus of flexible control strategies supporting communicative capitalism can also take the form of online fans crowdslapping media crowdsourcing campaigns seeking to exploit their affect for pre-existing media properties and personalities in order to compel them to create free promotional content and material for upcoming film and media productions. For example, in 2017, the phenomenon of crowdslapping was seen within a marketing campaign titled #IamMajor, which sought to crowdsource user-generated media content in order to promote a new film adaptation of the popular Japanese animated and manga franchise *Ghost in the Shell*. Requiring and seeking to channel the creative agency of fans and their affection for its central character Motoko Kusanagi — who goes by the title Major in the franchise and, in the film, is played by white American actress Scarlett Johansson — this campaign encouraged online users to upload "a picture and statement about their own inner strength into a poster for the film — thereby standing in for Johansson's character."¹²¹³ However, contrary to its intended purpose, the targeted fans were affectively compelled by their authentic passion for the Japanese source material to use the generator to spread meme images that, instead, heavily criticized the film's significant whitewashing of its Japanese protagonist through the casting of Johansson.¹²¹⁴

Sterling's tactical subversion of the Content ID system and this recent instance of media-based crowdslapping reveal how the tactical agency always present within the creative labour of online users can occasionally undermine communicative capitalism's more flexible strategies of control and constitute unexpected alternative content that cannot be fully channeled by them.

Crowdfunding and the Lingering Presence of Control and Power Relations

Moreover, as will be seen later in this section, a crowd-based form of tactical resistance to affect-dependent strategies of control similar to that of crowdsourced remakes like *Star Wars Uncut* and this *Ghost in the Shell* marketing campaign has also become visible over the past few years within the various funding campaigns for media projects being launched on Web 2.0-influenced crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter. Here, by adopting a strategy that Suzanne

youtubes-copyright-system/#6faed4aa444c

¹²¹³ Rachel Aroesti, "Ghost in the Shell: The Viral Campaign That Backfired Spectacularly," *The Guardian*, March 29th, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/mar/29/meme-ghost-in-shell-film-viral-campaign-get-out-gucci>

¹²¹⁴ Rachel Aroesti, "Ghost in the Shell: The Viral Campaign That Backfired Spectacularly," *The Guardian*, March 29th, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/mar/29/meme-ghost-in-shell-film-viral-campaign-get-out-gucci>; Angie Han, "'Ghost in the Shell' Gets Brutally Dragged in Its Own Viral Campaign," *Mashable*, March 13th, 2017, http://mashable.com/2017/03/13/ghost-in-the-shell-movie-meme-backfires/#3X_XtJKOPOqk

Scott terms fan-ancing,¹²¹⁵ Kickstarter campaigns seeking to resurrect popular media properties or produce an original work or piece of technology — in order to acquire a greater amount of donations and user participation — exploit the popularity of pre-existing media and established creators in order to stimulate and productively channel the affect of potential backers for them. Through this type of affective stimulation, such campaigns seek to compel these tentative backers into self-commodifying their affection for specific media objects and creators in the form of monetary pledges. This self-commodification of fan affect within media crowdfunding projects like the *Veronica Mars* movie has been detailed elsewhere by scholars like Matt Hills.¹²¹⁶ Through this strategy, the organizers of these campaigns and the projects they are funding can displace some of the costs associated with media production onto these passionate fans — a choice that primarily benefits them, movie studios, and Kickstarter itself which takes a cut from all pledges. Moreover, reinforcing the exploitative extraction of value resulting from this strategy, Kickstarter's distinctive approach to including and indirectly controlling creative projects on the platform also contributes to the power relations and inequality emerging between backers, project creators, and the platform's owners. More specifically, Kickstarter contributes to this state of affairs due to the disproportionate amount of control over campaign elements that it still affords to the project creators it includes and shapes. Similarly undermining its cultivated characterization as a truly inclusive, neutral and empowering platform for creators, Kickstarter also contributes to this kind of power asymmetry through the unilateral control it retains over its key architectural features choices like its all-or-nothing rewards-based and pre-purchase crowdfunding model. Moreover, it also contributes to these types of power relations through its terms of use and the lingering power it still accords to Kickstarter's owners and managers over the projects and pledges it ultimately allows.¹²¹⁷ This power also manifests itself through the guiding rules and conditions that Kickstarter chooses for all of its users including its rejection of particular types of projects such as projects that: seek funds for charity; feature pornographic material; or offer financial incentives to backers, the latter platform restriction still being in place even after this alternative option has become legally available in 2016 following the 2012

¹²¹⁵ See Suzanne Scott, "The Moral Economy of Crowdfunding and the Transformative Capacity of Fan-ancing," *New Media and Society* 17, no. 2 (February 2015): 167-182, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814558908>.

¹²¹⁶ See Matt Hills, "Veronica Mars, Fandom, and the 'Affective Economics' of Crowdfunding Poachers," *New Media & Society* 17.2 (February 2015): 183-197.

¹²¹⁷ "Terms of Use," *Kickstarter*, accessed on March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/terms-of-use?ref=footer>

passage of the Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act.¹²¹⁸ Exemplifying this stance towards financial incentives, director Hal Hartley's crowdfunding campaign for his film *Ned Rifle* (2014) was prevented by the platform from offering the U.S. theatrical rights for 7 years to a backer who pledged 9,000 \$ to the funding campaign because the reward seemed like an investment.¹²¹⁹ Such incidents foreground the power that Kickstarter's owners still possesses over the media funding campaigns it hosts and over the type of participation that is afforded to backers by project creators. Although opposition to Kickstarter's key structural features is rare, resistance to some of the specific decisions adopted by the project creators who engage in financing and to the relations of power and exploitation that the latter cultivate through them has become more common in recent years.

These power relationships, however, are often masked and supported by the platform's utopian Web 2.0-influenced narrative about itself, which associates Kickstarter and crowdfunding with notions of impartial neutrality, meritocratic democracy, creator and backer empowerment, and shared community. Within its description of its core goal and founder Yancey Strickler's earliest blog posts for the site, Kickstarter is presented as a neutral and inclusive platform enabling the funding of independent and riskier creative projects.¹²²⁰ Reinforcing this characterization, its "Kickstarter Basics" page even asserts that all the projects whose funding campaigns are hosted on the platform are independently constructed and controlled by their creators.¹²²¹ Even though its updated terms of use in 2014 states that creators are required to fulfill or at least take steps to meet their projects' promises to backers,¹²²² Kickstarter — in its description of its basic features and policies, its "Trust and Safety" page, and

¹²¹⁸ Yancey Strickler, "Introducing Launch Now and Simplified Rules," *Kickstarter*, June 3rd, 2014, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/introducing-launch-now-and-simplified-rules-0>; Issie Lapowsky, "Why Kickstarter Doesn't Want You to Profit From Your Donations," *Wired*, May 5th, 2014, <https://www.wired.com/2014/05/kickstarter-equity/>; Bourree Lam, "What is Crowdfunding For?" *The Atlantic*. Dec. 22nd, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/12/crowdfunding-equity-kickstarter-indiegogo/421473/>

¹²¹⁹ Pat Saperstein, "Updated: Hal Hartley Can't Offer Distribution Rights as Kickstarter Reward," *Variety*, November 25th, 2013, accessed May 17th, 2016, <http://variety.com/2013/film/news/indie-helmer-hal-hartley-sells-distribution-rights-as-kickstarter-reward-1200884677/>

¹²²⁰ "What is Kickstarter?," *Kickstarter*, accessed April 6th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/about?ref=footer>; Yancey Strickler, "Why Kickstarter?," *Kickstarter*, April 29th, 2009, accessed April 5th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/why-kickstarter?ref=hello>

¹²²¹ "Kickstarter Basics," *Kickstarter*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq/kickstarter+basics?ref=footer>

¹²²² "Terms of Use," *Kickstarter*, accessed on March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/terms-of-use?ref=footer>

its terms of use — still emphasizes the independence of creators and backers on the platform and, more importantly, its own lack of liability when it comes to the completion of projects, the evaluation of their claims, the settling of disputes and refunds, and the potential damages experienced by backers.¹²²³ In contrast to what it characterizes as profit-driven "traditional funding systems," Kickstarter even positively presents this hands-off crowdfunding approach as enabling a more inclusive, democratic, and empowering alternative platform for funding that allows creators to take more risks.¹²²⁴ In numerous interviews, Strickler and co-founder Perry Chen have similarly framed Kickstarter as a platform where great ideas for projects can be funded and meritocratically rewarded based on their actual quality.¹²²⁵ Kickstarter's cultivated image of democratizing inclusivity is also supported by the rhetoric of increased freedom present within its online 2014 introduction of its simplified project rules and its "Launch Now" feature, the latter of which enables more creators to independently launch campaigns for projects on the platform if approved by an automated algorithm following the input of a project's key components — rewards, funding goal, project description, etc.¹²²⁶ Supporting this Web 2.0 narrative of inclusivity and enhanced freedom is the tendency of Kickstarter through the various sections of its website and the commentary of representatives like Senior Film Outreach Lead Dan Schoenbrun to claim that it empowers artists and filmmakers who engage in less commercial and traditional types of work while also allowing them to creatively collaborate with audiences.¹²²⁷ Moreover, within its many web pages and through features like its "Community Tab," Kickstarter further masks its capitalistic motives and the power relations to which they contribute by characterizing itself as a communal platform that allows project creators and

¹²²³ "Kickstarter Basics," *Kickstarter*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq/kickstarter+basics?ref=footer>; "Trust & Safety," *Kickstarter*, accessed on March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/trust?ref=footer>; "Terms of Use," *Kickstarter*, accessed on March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/terms-of-use?ref=footer>

¹²²⁴ "Kickstarter Basics," *Kickstarter*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq/kickstarter+basics?ref=footer>

¹²²⁵ See Kelly Anderson, "The Kindness of Strangers," *Realscreen*, September 27th, 2011, <http://realscreen.com/2011/09/27/the-kindness-of-strangers/>; "Crowd-funding Art: Q & A: Perry Chen, Kickstarter," *Economist*, October 22nd, 2010, http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2010/10/crowd-funding_art

¹²²⁶ Yancey Strickler, "Introducing Launch Now and Simplified Rules," *Kickstarter*, June 3rd, 2014, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/introducing-launch-now-and-simplified-rules-0>

¹²²⁷ Yancey Strickler, Perry Chen, and Charles Adler, "Kickstarter is Not a Store," *Kickstarter*, September 20th, 2012, accessed March 25th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/kickstarter-is-not-a-store?ref=hello>; "Kickstarter is a Benefit Corporation," *Kickstarter*, accessed April 5th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/charter?ref=hello>; Barry Hertz, "How Kickstarter is Changing the Film Industry," *The Globe and Mail*, October 7th, 2015, last modified on October 8th, 2015, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/how-kickstarter-is-changing-the-film-industry/article26697767/>

backers to create, find, and be part of a user community and then collaborate with it.¹²²⁸ Echoing Web 2.0 discourse's communitarian rhetoric, this cultivated image gives the false impression that backers have a greater amount of control over the platform and its projects than they actually do. Kickstarter's strategic appropriation of Web 2.0 discourse's promise of an empowering form of creative participation and collaboration encourages online users to interact with the platform and voluntarily pledge their money to its projects in the hope of obtaining access to this creative empowerment. Akin to the voluntary contributions of online users to YouTube and their tacit acceptance of the power imbalance often present on that platform, the willing participation of users on Kickstarter similarly renders them complicit in the unequal relations of power and value exchange that they often have with project creators and the platform itself. Ultimately, the power imbalance and inequality between backers, creators, and Kickstarter's owners — which is strategically masked by this Web 2.0 rhetoric — limit more empowering forms of participation and collaboration for backers.

In recent years, various prominent fan-ancing campaigns for new media projects on the platform have foregrounded the suppressed power imbalance and the exploitative exchange of value that often accompany Kickstarter's funding campaigns. As previously described, these campaigns involve already popular and established media franchises and creators and seek to motivate mass amounts of funding from their fans in order to create original works, which are extensions of these franchises or the products of these artists. Similar to the other online forms of participatory media production analyzed throughout this dissertation, fan-ancing campaigns and the media productions they fund frequently accord backers very little control or input when it comes to the goals, features, and choices being adopted within them. Moreover, as will be illustrated in the following pages, some of these fan-ancing campaigns can often result in tension, conflict, and criticism that foreground the differing values and desires of backers, cultural commentators, and Kickstarter project creators — values and preferences which are often heavily influenced by Kickstarter's utopian rhetoric itself. For instance, over the last few years, various controversies have emerged around fan-ancing campaigns for media projects that highlight the often exploitative character of fan-ancing and the unequal power relations between

¹²²⁸ See “Community Guidelines,” *Kickstarter*, accessed March 28th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/community>; “Start a Project,” *Kickstarter*, accessed March 27th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/learn?ref=nav>; “Kickstarter Basics,” *Kickstarter*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/faq/kickstarter+basics?ref=footer>

backers and project creators that often accompany it. For instance, despite promising a more substantive form of creative participation to backers,¹²²⁹ actor Zach Braff's 2013 Kickstarter campaign for *Wish I was Here* (2014), his follow-up film to his cult indie film *Garden State* (2004), was also criticized for exploiting his fanbase by displacing a substantial portion of the financial risk of production onto fan-backers without offering anything substantial in return.¹²³⁰ Moreover, although this campaign presented this project as an independent film production that requires crowdfunding in order for Braff to retain full creative control and be free from the influence of Hollywood's "money people,"¹²³¹ it would eventually receive gap financing from Worldview Entertainment and its North American distribution rights were bought by Focus Features for 2.7 million dollars.¹²³² In response to both deals, Braff was criticized by commentators like Jason Baily for betraying the independent spirit promised in his campaign and promulgated by Kickstarter itself while others like Adam B. Vary wondered why, following its Focus Features deal, the project could not now offer backers refunds for their investment.¹²³³ In the comments sections of the project's Kickstarter page and its blog posts, a few backers even expressed their disappointment at the lack of transparency about the project's various sources of financing while, on the basis of such deals and the campaign's refusal to offer a copy of the film as a backer reward, criticizing the project as exploiting fans and betraying its wish to be

¹²²⁹ Zach Braff, "Campaign – Wish I was Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, April 24th, 2013, accessed May 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/description>

¹²³⁰ Chuck Klosterman, "Was It Ethical for Zach Braff to Take to Kickstarter?" *New York Times*, May 24th, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/magazine/was-it-ethical-for-zach-braff-to-take-to-kickstarter.html?_r=1; Lisa Marks, "Is it OK for multimillionaires like Zach Braff to panhandle for money on Kickstarter?" *The Guardian*. April 26th, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/apr/26/zack-braff-panhandle-money-kickstarter>; Devin Faraci, "What Veronica Mars Hath Wrought: Zach Braff Goes Kickstarter," *BirthMoviesDeath*, April 24th, 2013. <http://birthmoviesdeath.com/2013/04/24/what-veronica-mars-hath-wrought-zach-braff-goes-kickstarter>; David Taintor, "ScreenJunkies Goes After Zach Braff's Kickstarter Campaign," *Ad Week*, May 15th, 2013. <http://www.adweek.com/video/watch/break-media-goes-after-zach-braffs-kickstarter-campaign-149538>; "Don't Back Zach Braff – PSA," YouTube, YouTube video, 2:32, posted by "Screen Junkies," May 14th, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r--aybEuWeQ>

¹²³¹ Zach Braff, "Campaign – Wish I was Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, April 24th, 2013, accessed May 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/description>

¹²³² For information on these deals, see Pamela McClintock, "Cannes: Zach Braff's Kickstarter Film Lands Full Financing," *Hollywood Reporter*, May 15th, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cannes-zach-braffs-kickstarter-film-523352>; Andrew Stewart, "Sundance: Zach Braff's 'Wish I was Here' Bought by Focus Features," *Variety*, January 19th, 2014, <http://variety.com/2014/film/markets-festivals/sundance-zach-braffs-wish-i-was-here-bought-by-focus-features-1201064720/>

¹²³³ Jason Baily, "Despite His Protests, Zach Braff's Cannes Deal Violates the Spirit of His Kickstarter Campaign," *Flavorwire*, May 16th, 2013, <http://flavorwire.com/391767/does-zach-braffs-cannes-deal-mean-his-kickstarter-was-a-fraud>; Adam B. Vary, "Why Zach Braff's 'Wish I Was Here' Won't Be Refunding Its Kickstarter Backers," *Buzzfeed*, January 20th, 2014, https://www.buzzfeed.com/adambvary/zach-braff-wish-i-was-here-sundance-kickstarter?utm_term=.cuMQ1NzqkQ#.bonyM3Wqwy

independent from "money people."¹²³⁴ Because Kickstarter forbids the offering of financial incentives and *Wish I was Here* was always intended to become a commercial production that would primarily benefit its corporate stakeholders, its backers were deliberately not offered an adequate form of compensation or reward for their affect-driven contributions and their indirect promotion of the project — not even a digital VOD copy or a DVD of the very film they were funding¹²³⁵ — nor were they given a substantive amount of participatory and collaborative control with regard to the film's final form and such rewards. Even the higher pledge tiers offered mostly symbolic or experiential rewards like film credits, a signed slate, the naming of one of the film's fictional characters, and the opportunity to be a featured extra, a background extra, or a cast member — rewards that were not always explicitly guaranteed to be fulfilled, whose actual financial value did not match the pledge amount, and which occasionally involved seemingly uncompensated forms of cheap labour that would predominantly benefit Braff.¹²³⁶

Similar to Braff's campaign, the fan-driven crowdfunding campaign for "The Newest Hottest Spike Lee Joint" film project in 2012 —eventually becoming the vampire film *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus* (2014) — would be similarly criticized by various commentators and other platform users. These commentators and users judged Spike Lee — an already established director with industry connections that could fund this new work — to be taking advantage of Kickstarter and diverting money away from amateur filmmakers.¹²³⁷ However, while similarly exploiting the affect of his fans like Braff's project, Lee's fan-ancing campaign also reflected the

¹²³⁴ Veenno, April 26th, 2013, 15:15 PM, "Don't worry, I'm not missing the point. I've been participating in crowd-funding, both on Kickstarter and otherwise, for quite a while now. I know what the point is *supposed* to be. But the point of this campaign is simply exploiting crowd-funding and the fans...", comment on "Wish I Has Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, accessed July 2nd, 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/comments>; Veenno, April 26th, 2013, 15:08 PM, "Interesting. So, apparently, the entire point of this campaign is to avoid being controlled by "money people", as Zach put it, but when it comes to avoiding being controlled by "good distributors", whatever those may be, that's suddenly too much. Sorry, I don't buy it. I think it's just convenient to get money from people for both funding the film and paying to own it...", comment on "Wish I Has Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, accessed July 2nd, 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/comments>; Slawek, May 17th, 2013, comment on "Update 23: Correcting the 'Hollywood Reporter,'" May 15th, 2013, *Kickstarter*, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/posts/482298>

¹²³⁵ Zach Braff, "Campaign – Wish I was Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, April 24th, 2013, accessed May 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/description>

¹²³⁶ Zach Braff, "Campaign – Wish I was Here by Zach Braff," *Kickstarter*, April 24th, 2013, accessed May 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1869987317/wish-i-was-here-1/description>

¹²³⁷ Amanda Cochran, "Spike Lee defends \$1.4M Kickstarter film funds campaign." *CBS News*. August 22nd, 2013. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/spike-lee-defends-14m-kickstarter-film-funds-campaign/>; Perry Chen, Yancey Strickler, and Charles Adler. "The Truth About Spike Lee and Kickstarter," *Kickstarter*, August 19th, 2013. <https://www.kickstarter.com/blog/the-truth-about-spike-lee-and-kickstarter-0>

considerable amount of control and power afforded to project creators by Kickstarter by initially withholding concrete information about the full narrative premise of his planned film from its backers, knowing full well that their affective passion for his previous film work would be enough to compel them to participate and pledge money. Because not all backers received rewards whose financial value matched their pledge amount and they were not given the power to demand more transparent information from Lee, a power relationship with backers, as with *Wish I Was Here*, was formed. Exemplifying a greater amount of tactical resistance from the online crowd of users backing a media project using fan-ancing, however, is the two Kickstarter campaigns undertaken by game developer Keiji Inafune and his company Comcept in 2013 and 2015, respectively. For instance, in 2013, a Kickstarter campaign for *Mighty No. 9* — a game project billing itself as a spiritual successor to the highly popular, but long dormant 2-D-based *Mega Man* game series produced by Inafune and game company Capcom — successfully raised 4 million dollars by appealing to the affect of fans for this franchise and the genre it represented. However, lacking any control over its production, backers came to be dissatisfied with the project's numerous and unexpected broken promises and delays.¹²³⁸ Moreover, when a 2015 Kickstarter campaign was launched by Inafune to fund another purportedly independent game titled *Red Ash: The Indelible Legend* — which was a spiritual successor to the Playstation game *Mega Man Legends* — and the project quickly acquired a publisher during the funding period, potential backers who were fans of the original game or gaming in general and who had backed *Mighty Number 9* criticized Inafune for exploiting their nostalgic affection for the franchise in exchange for more money before completing the prior project and for using Kickstarter when it seemed unnecessary due to a publisher's newfound involvement.¹²³⁹ This resistance and negative publicity from online users would ultimately cause *Red Ash* to fail to meet its funding goal. Nevertheless, due to the inordinate amount of power over campaign and project elements that Kickstarter's architecture and its lack of accountability afford to creators who undertake media fan-ancing, backers tend to have very little control over the final direction of projects, the type of

¹²³⁸ Jason Schreier, "The Story Behind Mighty No. 9's Shady Delay," *Kotaku*, August 7th, 2015.

<http://kotaku.com/the-story-behind-mighty-no-9s-shady-delay-1722766843>; Owen S. Good, "Mighty No. 9 delayed for a third time," *Polygon*, Jan. 25th, 2016, <http://www.polygon.com/2016/1/25/10826078/mighty-no-9-delayed-for-a-third-time>

¹²³⁹ Jason Schreier, "The Red Ash Kickstarter is a Disaster," *Kotaku*, July 30th, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/the-red-ash-kickstarter-is-a-disaster-1721094852>; Owen S. Good, "Keiji Inafune's latest Kickstarter campaign falls short, but the game will still be made," *Polygon*, August 03, 2015. <http://www.polygon.com/2015/8/3/9090917/red-ash-kickstarter-keiji-inafune>

rewards they receive, and the availability of the very products they are funding, nor are they guaranteed transparent information about them or even their completion. Furthermore, because of the platform's rejection of financial incentives, they also can never receive more substantive forms of monetary compensation or profit sharing in exchange for their pledges. In addition, the adopted architecture and policy choices of Kickstarter also give the already established creators and owners of these types of projects the power to: displace a significant part of the financial risk of production onto the passionate fans of pre-existing popular media; refrain from being fully transparent about their goals; and accept the affect-driven pledges of backers without being obligated to fulfill their various stated promises. With the power reflected through this type of control over the funding campaigns and the resulting projects, these creators can accumulate more capital and exposure for comparatively little cost or risk, thus increasing their financial and cultural power. In addition, the degree of participation and collaboration afforded to backers within the above projects — even though they assume the bulk of the risk — is often severely limited by their creators and owners due to the latter's propensity to unilaterally produce works whose potential profit and ownership can be more easily privatized for their benefit. Despite this tendency, as in the case of Inafune's campaign for his *Red Ash* project, fan-ancing as an affective and discursive strategy of control seeking to stimulate the affect of online users for specific popular media texts and artists in order to compel them into pledging money can never fully contain the agency driving this affective response. In reality, the frequently affect-driven character of online user participation can often turn against these projects and manifest itself tactically as a form of crowdslapping.

One of the more prominent examples of this exploitative use of fan-ancing to fund media productions and the resistance of backers to their usual lack of control and collaborative or participatory input over Kickstarter projects and campaign rewards could be seen within the highly popular and successful Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign in March 2013 for a movie based on the *Veronica Mars* television series (2004-2007). Reintroducing a Web 2.0 narrative of creative empowerment for online users, original series creator Rob Thomas and lead actress Kristin Bell would frame the *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter on its project page as a response to Warner Bros' disinterest in the intellectual property, which they owned, and as a revolutionary means for fans to speak out, exert their own form of power over the realm of media production, and participate in what will be a historically significant crowdfunding project and film with its

creators.¹²⁴⁰ However, echoing the similar function of Kickstarter's own crowdfunding discourse, David Gehring and D.E. Wittkower have correctly asserted that the symbolic and experiential rewards discursively promised to the fan-funders supporting these types of media fan-ancing projects — the value that comes with participating within the creative process and enabling the creative autonomy of creators, for instance — frequently mask the commercial motivations often driving this autonomy and are frequently accompanied by a disempowering lack of control for backers, who are instead confined to the choices and terms imposed by their creators.¹²⁴¹ The power of these creators over the decisions and terms shaping the participation of backers is the direct product of the substantial amount of control accorded to them by the Kickstarter platform over their funding campaigns and projects.

Supporting Gehring and Wittkower's argument, the celebratory rhetoric about backer empowerment surrounding the Kickstarter for the *Veronica Mars* feature film was thus substantially undermined due to the lack of control, input, and ownership that fan-backers had over the *Veronica Mars* film and its distribution in exchange for the significant amount of financial resources and promotional value that they offered to the project. In particular, this power asymmetry with the creators of this campaign and project would reveal itself following the film's eventual release when it came to the viewing options offered to backers by Warner Bros. For instance, as reported by many news sources, following the film's release through Time Warner's film distribution services Flixster and Ultraviolet, backers became angry over the perception that a streaming version of the film on a cloud-based service is not a commodity they can truly own as well as due to their inability to obtain access to their digital version of the film as a result of registration problems, software incompatibility and downloading issues, and accessibility obstacles involving non-U.S. backers.¹²⁴² Despite the campaign's promise to offer a “digital version of the film within a few days of the theatrical premiere” through Flixster,¹²⁴³

¹²⁴⁰ “The Veronica Mars Movie Project by Rob Thomas,” *Kickstarter*, March 13th, 2013, accessed April 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/description>; “About this Project,” *Kickstarter* Video, 5:25, posted by Rob Thomas, March 13th, 2013, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/description>

¹²⁴¹ David Gehring and D.E. Wittkower, “On the Sale of Community in Crowdfunding: Questions of Power, Inclusion, and Value,” in *Crowdfunding the Future: Media Industries, Ethics and Digital Society*, eds. Lucy Bennett, Bertha Chin, and Bethan Jones (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 72, 75, 77.

¹²⁴² Kory Grow, “Veronica Mars' Kickstarter Backers Angry at Rewards,” *Rolling Stone*, March 18th, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/veronica-mars-kickstarter-backers-angry-at-rewards-20140318>

¹²⁴³ “The Veronica Mars Movie Project by Rob Thomas,” *Kickstarter*, March 13th, 2013, accessed May 15th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/description>

many backers of the project interpreted the words to signify a more permanent downloadable version that they could more fully control and call their own as opposed to streaming access to the film.¹²⁴⁴ Occasionally unable to access their film prior to non-backers, they were angry at Warner Bros for exerting the type of control over distribution that comes with true ownership over the project and because of the lack of input and control they personally held over this aspect of the campaign — its backer rewards.¹²⁴⁵ The backlash of fans over these accessibility and ownership issues would eventually compel Warner Bros to offer refunds to backers forced to purchase the film again on an alternative media platform like iTunes or Amazon.¹²⁴⁶ Ultimately, the conflict between creators and backers resulting from this event within the *Veronica Mars* campaign highlighted the comparative lack of real participatory and collaborative involvement and power accorded to fans on Kickstarter when it came to the production and distribution of such media fan-ancing projects. As argued by previously mentioned scholars like Gehring and Wittkower, but also by Suzanne Scott and Anna Kustritz, fan-ancing campaigns and media projects on Kickstarter like the *Veronica Mars* film along with the platform's own rewards-based model of crowdfunding itself and the defenses of this model — rather than empowering backers in the creative realm and the marketplace — confine them to the more limited participation of a passive consumer within an exploitative capitalistic system while allowing the creators of these projects to privatize their potential profit and benefits as they offer their backers no real

¹²⁴⁴ For an example of this type of response, see Hikaricore, March 15th, 2014, 13:48 PM, "The people who are complaining are not dumb, they (we) are understandably upset that the promise of a digital download was less than genuine...", comment on "Veronica Mars Movie Project," *Kickstarter*, accessed July 2nd, 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/comments>

¹²⁴⁵ See Jessica, March 15th, 2014, 14:16 PM, "I'm in the same boat as many others. I got the script but not the link or code to download. It really feels like backers got taken advantage of. We provided the momentum and basis for publicity, to say nothing of the initial capital. But non-backers got to see the movie first, for the same or lower price....", comment on "Veronica Mars Movie Project," *Kickstarter*, accessed July 3rd, 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/comments>; Mark Riechers, March 16th, 2014, 10:18 AM, "A message to other backers frustrated by the Flixster decision for backers: I think this might be a reason to never back a film on Kickstarter again. If creators are going to take our money and turn around and cut deals with studios without our input, they don't deserve our support", comment for the "Veronica Mars Movie Project," *Kickstarter*, accessed July 12th, 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/comments>

¹²⁴⁶ For reports of this negative reaction from backers, see Kory Grow, "Veronica Mars' Kickstarter Backers Angry at Rewards," *Rolling Stone*, March 18th, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/veronica-mars-kickstarter-backers-angry-at-rewards-20140318>; Ashley Lee, "Veronica Mars' Kickstarter Backers to Receive Refunds After Digital Download Snafus (Report)," *Hollywood Reporter*, March 14th, 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/veronica-mars-kickstarter-backers-receive-688835>; Yvonne Villarreal, "Warner Bros. to refund dissatisfied 'Veronica Mars' contributors," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15th, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-warner-bros-refund-veronica-mars-contributors-20140315-story.html#axzz2wEi9biON>

substantive form of reward, nor any significant amount of transformative input, control, or ownership over them.¹²⁴⁷ This lack of empowerment or adequate rewards was also compounded by Kickstarter's continuing policy decision against financial incentives for backers — a stance rejected by competing media crowdfunding platforms like Fig.¹²⁴⁸ Consequently, scholar Mel Stanfill is correct to foreground how the crowdfunding campaign to fund the studio film on Kickstarter echoes an austerity logic by “socializing the risk of producing a large-scale film” while still privatizing the resulting rewards.¹²⁴⁹ Echoing this argument, scholar Luke Pebler also criticized this campaign for exploiting fans by allowing major film studios who can easily assume the financial risk of film production to displace a considerable amount of it onto them.¹²⁵⁰ The limited amount of control and participatory input afforded to backers within this campaign and project and the unequal exchange of value in which they are involved are also exacerbated by the creators' suggestion that higher backer rewards like the opportunity to be a background extra in the film may not be actually fulfilled as well as by the fact that the financial value of many of these more expensive rewards are not commensurate with the pledge amount required for them.¹²⁵¹ Ultimately, even though this fan-ancing project acquired its funding from the online crowd by exploiting the affect of fans and promising them a substantive form of creative empowerment, backers are not offered much control over the film, its circulation, and its eventual profits. Instead, this type of control rests predominantly in the private hands of creators like Thomas and media corporations like Warner Bros — a state of affairs that is enabled by Kickstarter's unique affordance of a disproportionate amount of power to the project creators adopting the platform. Lastly, Thomas' adoption of fan-ancing via Kickstarter to fund the

¹²⁴⁷ Scott, “The Moral Economy of Crowdfunding and the Transformative Capacity of Fan-ancing,” 168, 170-171, 173; Anna Kustritz, “Exploiting Surplus Labours of Love: Narrating Ownership and Theft in Crowdfunding Controversies,” in *Crowdfunding the Future: Media Industries, Ethics and Digital Society*, edited by Lucy Bennett, Bertha Chin, and Bethan Jones (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 51-52, 58, 60; Gehring and Wittkower, “On the Sale of Community in Crowdfunding: Questions of Power, Inclusion, and Value,” 70, 75.

¹²⁴⁸ Slava Rubin, “Announcing Equity Investing for All,” *IndieGogo*, November 15th, 2016, <https://go.indiegogo.com/blog/2016/11/equity-investing.html>; Chris Kohler, “Kickstarter Superstars Launch a Crowdfunding Site for Games,” *Wired*, August 18th, 2015, <https://www.wired.com/2015/08/fig-crowdfunding-outer-wilds/>; “Investing at Fig,” *Fig*, accessed May 24th, 2017, <https://www.fig.co/invest#investment-crowdfunding>

¹²⁴⁹ Mel Stanfill, “The Veronica Mars Kickstarter, Fan-ancing, and Austerity Logics,” *Melstanfill.com*, March 25th, 2013, <http://www.melstanfill.com/the-veronica-mars-kickstarter-fan-ancing-and-austerity-logics/>

¹²⁵⁰ Luke Pebler, “Guest Post: My Gigantic Issue With the Veronica Mars Kickstarter,” *Suzanne-Scott.com*, March 15th, 2013, <http://www.suzanne-scott.com/2013/03/15/guest-post-my-gigantic-issue-with-the-veronica-mars-kickstarter/>

¹²⁵¹ “The Veronica Mars Movie Project by Rob Thomas,” *Kickstarter*, March 13th, 2013, accessed May 16th, 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/559914737/the-veronica-mars-movie-project/description>

Veronica Mars movie project, like the *Star Wars Uncut* project, is another flexible strategy of control within communicative capitalism's supporting media apparatus — a strategy that again seeks to modulate, exploit, and channel the productive affect of fans for a pre-existing media property in order to collectively create a media object that inordinately benefits its initiating creators and owners as well as the owners of the Web 2.0-influenced online platforms that facilitate this creative process.

Potential Alternatives and Future Avenues of Research

Even though the flexible strategies of control that are tied to our communicative incarnation of neoliberal capitalism and which target the productive affect and creative agency of online users have become so pervasive that they can even be found within crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, the tactical autonomy of connected users within these platforms — as illustrated in several of the preceding paragraphs and chapters — retains a constituent potential to resist some of these strategies and the power relations and types of inequality they tend to cultivate. In addition, it holds the potential to constitute and create alternative practices, spaces, and projects that circumvent or avoid them and their influence. For instance, responding to the creative agency of online users and their frequent opposition to platform features like YouTube's Content ID system, social media platforms like VidMe have positioned themselves as more liberatory and empowering alternatives to Google's platform through a combination of discourse and the adoption of different content filtering and monetization strategies and affordances. Even though these emerging platforms strategically deploy affectively charged discursive promises of an alternative environment more amenable to the creative agency of online users in order to attract them to contribute content within their own enclosed spaces, this affective-discursive strategy and the minor differences in platform features adopted by them are merely alternative incarnations of the same flexible apparatus of control currently supporting communicative capitalism. Nevertheless, the small architectural changes adopted by such platforms in response to the desire of online users for their creative and tactical agency to be strengthened foreground the constituent power of the latter to influence their owners into possibly embracing alternative policy decisions and platform features that could cultivate more empowering exchanges of value and equitable power relationships with users. For instance, VidMe highlights its "human-powered customer service and copyright teams," so it can discursively differentiate itself from YouTube's Content ID system and attract creators negatively affected by it like the members of

TeamFourStar into contributing content to this rival platform.¹²⁵² VidMe also distinguishes itself through its purported movement away from a focus on advertising revenue — which it views as holding the potential to constrain the content and quality of its users' videos — towards a monetization model dependent on monthly subscriptions and donations akin to Twitch.¹²⁵³ In addition, in order to attract users away from rival YouTube and attempt to differentiate itself from the unequal exchanges of value and lack of control experienced there with regard to particular aspects of monetization, VidMe also offers a more generous split of this model's revenue between its owners and its "verified" users — 90 % for users and 10 % for the platform owners when it comes to subscriptions or 100 % for users in the case of donations — and gives creators to self-determine the exact cost of a viewer subscription.¹²⁵⁴ Although VidMe does seek to present itself as an alternative to the content-based restrictions and unequal exchanges of value often found between creative users, MCNs, and YouTube's owners, its substantially lower viewership numbers prevent it from being a true alternative. Moreover, like YouTube, it still relies on exploitative monetization strategies that attempt to channel and convert the affect of viewers into profitable donations or subscriptions for nothing or for minimal rewards that have little extrinsic value. Furthermore, given the propensity of social media platforms to impose new restrictions, revenue splits, and monetization strategies that are less beneficial for users once they have acquired a larger userbase and need more money to cover the costs of hosting its activity and to profit from it, it is likely that some of VidMe's more empowering features and choices for new users will be replaced with additional monetization and control strategies that are similar to rival platforms like YouTube. Conversely, if VidMe fails to obtain a high enough amount of users and profit in its current form and vanishes, one potential alternative for slightly less exploitative relations between participating users and platform owners, which it suggests, will disappear and creators like TeamFourStar will be forced to find yet another means of hosting their content without being exposed to the constraints of the predominantly automated copyright enforcement systems of contemporary social media platforms like YouTube.

¹²⁵² "FAQ," *Vid.Me*, accessed May 20th, 2017, <https://vid.me/faq>

¹²⁵³ Warren Shaeffer, "Subscriptions: Rethinking Monetization," *Medium*, April 17th, 2017, <https://medium.com/vidme/subscriptions-rethinking-monetization-dfb69fdcc0dd>; Warren Shaeffer, "Creators First. Not Advertisers," *Medium*, March 31st, 2017, <https://medium.com/vidme/creators-first-not-advertisers-6d3abd1d0af9>

¹²⁵⁴ "Earn Money," *Vid.Me*, accessed May 25th, 2017, <https://vid.me/earn>; Warren Shaeffer, "Subscriptions: Rethinking Monetization," *Medium*, April 17th, 2017, <https://medium.com/vidme/subscriptions-rethinking-monetization-dfb69fdcc0dd>

This potential for alternative and less exploitative incarnations of the Web 2.0 paradigm can also be increasingly felt within the latter's more crowd-driven and collaborative embodiments like media crowdsourcing. For instance, the substantially unequal and exploitative exchange of value often present within their more commercial counterparts like *Life in a Day* are partially resisted within non-profit media crowdsourcing projects which are driven by a larger social and historiographical purpose like Ruddick's *One Day on Earth* (2012). One such contemporary non-profit instance of a media crowdsourcing project with a historical aim is Bill Lichtenstein's long running crowdsourced archive and documentary film project *The American Revolution* about a rock-focused and Boston-based radio station WBCN-FM and its role amidst the radical political changes and social upheaval being experienced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The above type of exploitation is also less palpable within media crowdsourcing projects that are non-profit and intended to be viewed for free like the fan-driven crowdsourced remakes *Our Robocop Remake* and *Scarface Redux*, both of which are non-commercial instances of fair use and, as a result, more independent from the copyright owners of the media properties they appropriate. They are also more independent from the promotional and production strategies of copyright owners than similar counterparts like the *Mad Men Fan Cut* and *Empire Strikes Back Uncut* with its strong connection to Lucasfilm. Likewise, a public art and crowdsourcing remake project entitled "Crowdsourced Cinema" and undertaken by Massachusetts's Northampton Community Television (NCTV) from 2015 onwards has also come to embody this less exploitative alternative due to its non-profit character and its existence from the copyright owners of these media properties as a more genuinely communal enterprise. Through this project, its organizers invited online users and community members with a NCTV membership — whose donation cost is entirely voluntary — and sought to channel their affection for popular films such as *The Princess Bride* (1987), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and, more recently, *Back to the Future* (1985) in order to engage and entice them into participating in the project and collaboratively re-creating each film scene-by-scene.¹²⁵⁵ Somewhat akin to the earlier incarnation of the *Star Wars Uncut* project, these aspects of the "Crowdsourced Cinema" project also reflect how the relative autonomy and constituent potential of the affect-driven labour of

¹²⁵⁵ "Crowdsourced Cinema," *Northampton Television*, accessed May 27th, 2017, <http://northamptontv.org/crowdsourcedcinema/>; "Crowdsourced Cinema Films," *Northampton Television*, accessed May 15th, 2017, <http://northamptontv.org/crowdsourced-cinema-films/>

networked users can often create cultural objects that appropriate and transform existing media, but which are not deterministically shaped and controlled by the capitalistic interests of proprietary media corporations. Furthermore, the resulting rewards and products of participation within NCTV's "Crowdsourced Cinema" endeavour and other non-profit media crowdsourcing projects are often expected to be intrinsic and to be publicly shared and distributed. In contrast, their more commercial counterparts are predominantly driven by marketing goals and the privatization of the potential extrinsic benefits and profit resulting from them, all of which tends to produce a more unequal exchange of value with their participants. Nevertheless, despite these differences, these incarnations of the crowdsourced remake genre always exist in a partially supportive relationship with media corporations due to their inadvertent promotion of the copyrighted media texts and properties that they appropriate. Moreover, as illustrated by the control that the managers of the "Crowdsourced Cinema" project hold over its key aspects,¹²⁵⁶ the organizers of non-profit works of media crowdsourcing still cultivate an asymmetrical power relationship with their participating users due to the often restrictive form of centralized control that they possess over the intended final form, tasks, rules, and platform choices that structure the latter's participation within these projects.

Elsewhere, while certain media crowdsourcing projects like *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* or *The Johnny Cash Project* have used procedural algorithms to include a larger amount of user submissions within dynamic and constantly changing versions of themselves, other recent media projects driven by crowdsourcing have instead sought or planned to enable their participants to have more input over their final form and their monetization and to be more transparent about the latter process, so as to render the exchange of value within them more equal. They have also made atypical choices that have minimized, whether intentionally or not, the amount of exploitation and risk being experienced and assumed by their contributors. For instance, launched in 2010, American actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt's crowdsourcing-driven hitRECORD web platform and production company as well as his corresponding television show *hitRECORD on TV* (2014-2015) financially compensate their contributing users if their work is included in a monetized project. More interestingly, hitRECORD allows its community to offer feedback for two weeks about the percentage of the funding that they will receive after being

¹²⁵⁶ "Crowdsourced Cinema," *Northampton Television*, accessed May 27th, 2017, <http://northamptontv.org/crowdsourcedcinema/>

provided Profit Proposal documents containing a tentative distribution of the revenue among a project's contributors — feedback that is, nevertheless, reviewed and integrated, if possible, within a Final Profit document by the staff who hold the "final determination of the Final Profit splits."¹²⁵⁷ Moreover, the profits accumulated are always split 50/50 between hitRECORD.org LLC itself and other contributing artists regardless of the respective amount of labour accomplished by the two parties.¹²⁵⁸ Recently, Sony Pictures would use the platform in order to crowdsource user-generated material featuring individuals expressing their "impossible dreams" for three documentary shorts promoting the release of director Robert Zemeckis' new film starring Levitt, *The Walk* (2015), a film about Philippe Petit's infamous 1974 tightrope walk between the Twin Towers.¹²⁵⁹ Thus, although many participants on hitRECORD are excluded from receiving extrinsic rewards if their submissions are not selected and power asymmetries linger, the platform still interestingly allows participating users a voice in affecting the distribution of revenue that they will receive in exchange for their labour. Exemplifying another potential variation within the realm of media crowdsourcing was the initial intention of director Timo Vuorensola in April 2016 to follow his partially crowdsourced films, *Iron Sky* (2012) and its upcoming sequel *Iron Sky: The Coming Race* (2017), with a third film that would be "crowdsourced from start to finish."¹²⁶⁰ More significantly, however, for this planned project, Vuorensola was meant to step down as its director and participants would be producing and directing the film while raising funds for it with the help of former producer Tero Kaukomaa, thus affording them a substantially larger amount of input when it came to its final form than past media crowdsourcing projects.¹²⁶¹ However, while this intention to relinquish more of the organizers' control over the film suggests an alternative to media crowdsourcing projects that relegate contributors to a more subservient and limited form of participation, it would soon evaporate following the announcement a few months later that this third film, now titled *Iron*

¹²⁵⁷ "Frequently Asked Questions," *Hitrecord*, accessed March 31st, 2016, <https://www.hitrecord.org/help>

¹²⁵⁸ Matt Conley, "Profit Update // 2015 Q3+Q4 Community Profits," *Hitrecord.org*, Jul. 26th, 2016, <https://hitrecord.org/records/2929675>

¹²⁵⁹ Joseph Gordon-Levitt, "RE: The Impossible Dream Update," *Hitrecord.org*, June 4th, 2015, <https://www.hitrecord.org/records/1798182>

¹²⁶⁰ "Iron Sky 3 to be Directed and Produced by Fans," *IronSky.net*, April 1st, 2016, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160406103848/http://www.ironsky.net:80/blog/iron-sky-3-to-be-directed-and-produced-by-fans/>

¹²⁶¹ "Iron Sky 3 to be Directed and Produced by Fans," *IronSky.net*, April 1st, 2016, Internet Archive screengrab, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160406103848/http://www.ironsky.net:80/blog/iron-sky-3-to-be-directed-and-produced-by-fans/>

Sky: The Ark, would indeed be directed by Vuroensola and produced in partnership with the Chinese company Shandong Jiabo Culture Development Co.¹²⁶² While the above examples suggest its possible existence, the potential for alternative crowdsourcing arrangements within media production remain heavily constrained by the competing interests of corporations and professional artists, particularly their pursuit of a predominantly privatized form of profit.

In order to provide a more extensive picture of the political economy of this now dominant Web 2.0-based media environment, future critical research about this new environment should build on this dissertation's analysis of the flexible strategies of control currently supporting communicative capitalism by seeking to uncover additional alternative manifestations of user-driven media platforms, practices, and projects — alternatives which can potentially circumvent or resist such strategies and cultivate more radical and authentic forms of empowerment for online users. Using this dissertation as a jumping off point, other lines of inquiry within this area of digital media research should include a greater examination of the rare, but increasingly frequent cases of YouTube celebrities circumventing the negative effects of the control strategies discussed in this project and acquiring enough power, exposure, and capital via their participation within this ecosystem to exploit and flexibly manipulate a significant portion of their fanbase. Avoiding the tendency to idealistically view online user participation exclusively in terms of its non-commercial or resistant cultural potential, this new avenue of research would build upon this dissertation's more nuanced conceptions of cultural participation and empowerment along with their rejection of utopian notions of democratization and enhanced participation within the political and creative realm. It would also further reveal the complicit relationship of online user participation with the monetization and control strategies of a capitalistic digital economy. By acknowledging this relationship, monetary revenue for creative users can be further viewed as another element that can empower the average users of social media platforms like YouTube and whose potential is actively promised within Web 2.0 discourse's rhetoric of amateur empowerment. Furthermore, in order to uncover first-hand knowledge of the motivations and beliefs that drive users to contribute their media content within these online spaces or to resist the strategies that seek to shape this participation,

¹²⁶² Nick Holdsworth, "'Iron Sky 3' In the Works as China Co-Production," *Hollywood Reporter*, June 14th, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/iron-sky-3-works-as-902564>; "Iron Sky Expands to the China Market," *IronSky.Net*, June 14th, 2016, <http://ironsky.net/2016/06/14/iron-sky-expands-to-the-china-market/>

future investigations of the user-driven media activity emerging within this twenty first century online media environment should combine this project's critical-theoretical and political-economic approach to digital media studies with a more extensive use of quantitative and qualitative methodological tools like interviews and surveys. The newfound information acquired through such methods could beneficially complement, support, or further complicate this dissertation's analysis of the affective and ideological appeal of Web 2.0 discourse to online users and allow other researchers to determine the potentially common set of beliefs shared by certain groups of YouTube users like gameplay commentators or fanvid parody creators. Likewise, due to the research obstacle caused by the lack of transparency that often surrounds the partnership contracts of MCNs and social media platforms, the adoption of the above methods in future analyses of monetized user-generated practices like gameplay commentary can create new knowledge about the varying ad revenue splits found within these contracts and the amount of capital that users acquire per video or on their channel over a specific stretch of time.

Moreover, forthcoming research on user-driven, online media practices should also expand this dissertation's critical analysis of our new Web 2.0-based media ecosystem by researching the impact of the inadequate moderation and curation often found within social media platforms on the creative activity of their users as well as their financial and cultural empowerment. Due to the minimal amount of human-powered moderation, community guidelines enforcement, or adequate tools allowing users to undertake these tasks themselves, online media platforms like YouTube are often marked by an influx of toxic and harassing content within its user videos and its comment sections that runs counter to its community rules. Undercutting the more utopian claims about inclusivity and creative empowerment often found within Web 2.0 discourse, this more toxic user-generated media can create a hostile environment that prevents more vulnerable users who are part of an oppressed racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious minority or gender from creatively expressing themselves with the same freedom as other users. In addition, as seen with the advertising boycott addressed earlier, it also holds the potential to constrain YouTube creators' ability to financially empower themselves through their ad-supported work. Even though this social media problem has become a significant subject of study within academic research over the years — particularly following the 2014 harassment campaign known as Gamergate within the game industry and due to the increasingly negative effects of toxic content on popular platforms like Twitter and YouTube — the intersection of

online harassment with the expressive speech activity and media of creative users on social media platforms, especially the most vulnerable, still merits considerably more research. Further research and analysis in this area could shed light on alternative platform structures, policy enforcement strategies, and moderation features that could potentially help to fix this growing obstacle to the expression of marginalized and historically oppressed demographic groups or, at least, empower their users to more easily combat it. More importantly, the exploration of this new research avenue would also further support this dissertation's repeated demonstration of the inherent impossibility of ever fully adhering to the utopian, radical, and totalizing conception of inclusivity embedded within Web 2.0 discourse. It would achieve this end by examining how certain types of exclusionary strategies are indeed necessary within online media platforms in order to cultivate a space where users can freely engage in culturally beneficial forms of expression and where the original media of other creative users is not illegally reproduced elsewhere on the platform for profit. Complementing this increasingly important avenue of study, it is also necessary for new research on the political economy of this online media ecosystem to critically look at how the above problem has come to exacerbate the longstanding tension between two specific profit-driven goals of YouTube: specifically, its wish to satisfy the capitalistic and proprietary interests of media companies and other corporate and advertising partners; and its parallel need to cultivate and flexibly control a thriving and diverse social environment marked by an increasing amount of user-generated content and interactions that can be monetized. As seen with the platform's recent advertising crisis, YouTube's flawed attempt to satisfy the promotional interests of corporations and brands while still enabling its users to freely express themselves and produce more content has resulted in a compromise that can financially disempower users who are accidentally or arbitrarily caught up in its automated demonetization system due to a 'false positive' match or their occasional engagement with socio-political issues.

In addition, upcoming studies of less individualistic and more crowd-driven embodiments of media production informed by the Web 2.0 paradigm such as the online crowdsourcing and crowdfunding of film and digital media would also benefit from the integration of this dissertation's critical-theoretical and political-economic approach with the use of qualitative and quantitative methods like interviews and surveys in relation to crowdsourcing participants and crowdfunding backers. Presently, because there exists only a minimal amount of research that specifically focuses on their varying motivations for participating within the production of

particular media-related crowdsourcing and crowdfunding projects and their evolving thoughts about them, the appropriation of these complementary methodological tools would provide more knowledge to contemporary scholars about their motives and whether or not they feel creatively empowered or exploited within them. If the adoption of interviews leads to questions delving into other less transparent areas about media crowdsourcing projects, it could also potentially provide new information about participants' release contracts with their organizers. Furthermore, expanding on an intervention undertaken within this dissertation's previous chapter, future critical analyses of media crowdsourcing projects and media crowdfunding campaigns should undertake further research — using interviews and other methods — on the composition of their organizers and their owners along with their management strategies and intentions rather than solely focusing on the constitution of the crowd and the motivation of its members. Such information could helpfully uncover this group's diversity or lack thereof, its potential corporate connections, and its goals and strategies — aspects that could further contextualize the capitalistic, Western, middle class, and gendered biases that often do seem to shape the rules, terms, and conditions for participating in media crowdsourcing projects. It would also provide clarifying knowledge about the ultimate goals, the management and campaign strategies, and the perceived identity and role of the organizers of media crowdsourcing and crowdfunding projects, but also about the type of obstacles and constraints to their creative agency and their collaboration with participants and backers that they experience. Aside from looking at the composition and actions of their organizers, future investigations of media crowdfunding in particular should examine, in closer detail, the impact of the growing expansion of equity and investment crowdfunding options in the U.S. on the hierarchical power relations and forms of inequality that tend to be cultivated between backers and project organizers within a crowdfunding platform like Kickstarter. Future research on the political economy of this digitally networked media ecosystem emerging from the 1990s onwards and the neoliberal information economy it supports would thus strongly benefit from engaging in these new lines of research in order to build on this dissertation's critical analyses of the various incarnations of Web 2.0 discourse and of this online environment's user-driven media practices.

Final Remarks

Nevertheless, as it stands, this dissertation has provided a solid foundation for these alternative avenues of scholarly research on this Web 2.0-influenced media ecosystem. Its case

study analyses of representative user-driven media practices within this twenty first century online media environment have detailed the interconnected and often tense relationship between the creative labour and agency of online users with communicative capitalism's dynamic apparatus of control, which is driven by various corporate entities seeking to encourage, manipulate, and channel the productive capacities of these users through various discursive and non-discursive strategies intended to convert them into profit. They have also foregrounded how the latter apparatus of control is highly dependent on the relative creative autonomy of participatory online users and actively seeks to encourage it through the use of discursive rhetoric promising them an empowered and affectively satisfying type of neoliberal subjectivity and through the targeted stimulation of their pre-existing affective tendencies towards popular media texts. More importantly, even as such strategies seek to profit from the participatory creative agency of users and occasionally do financially empower them, the dissertation's analyses of these case studies have also exposed the power relations, inequality, exploitation, and constraints that often still stem from the tactical interactions of creative users with the growing apparatus of flexible control strategies that is becoming dominant within user-driven online media platforms and crowdsourcing projects — strategies such as automated content filtering and identification software, open-ended platform features, and partnership contracts. By revealing the lingering presence of these asymmetrical power relations despite the idealistic rhetoric surrounding social media platforms and media crowdsourcing, these case study analyses significantly undercut the misleading utopianism that continues to mark both popular and scholarly discourse about the Internet and the Web 2.0 paradigm. However, rather than revealing the totalizing capture of the tactical agency of online users within this new online media ecosystem, this dissertation's central case study analyses highlight the constituent power of online user creators' relatively autonomous labour and its capacity to resist the above control strategies and construct alternative media spaces, practices, and projects that avoid and oppose their shaping influence. Lastly, these analyses have also provided new knowledge about under-researched user-driven media practices like fanvid parody, gameplay commentary, and various incarnations of media crowdsourcing while demonstrating their complicated interactions with the varying strategies of flexible control that now mark and support communicative capitalism's expanding neoliberal incorporation of online social productivity as well as with the various

global corporate interests that deploy and benefit from them within our twenty first century online media ecosystem.

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