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**“Welcome to your world”:  
YouTube and the Reconfiguration of Music’s Gatekeepers**  
Holly Rogers

YouTube isn’t just a website ... or even a technology,  
but more a whole field of cultural practice (Simon Reynolds).<sup>1</sup>

When YouTube began in 2005, its slogan of “Your Digital Video Repository” marked its cultural position as a storage and sharing space for amateur, homemade content. A year later, in 2006, *Time Magazine* announced “You” as their person of the year: “Yes, you. You Control the Information Age. Welcome to your world” was written underneath a mirrored YouTube screen with the word “You” emblazoned across it (figure 1). Recognising the contribution to creativity, artistry, citizen journalism and

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE >

the cultural industries of amateur users to websites like YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia and Myspace, the accolade thrust what Jay Rosen calls “the people formally known as the audience” into the cultural foreground.<sup>2</sup> Sonic material featured heavily and, although YouTube initially battled Myspace as a platform for developing, showcasing and promoting musical talent, it rapidly assumed dominance as a leading, malleable and participatory site for musical content. Almost immediately, the platform exerted a seismic influence on all corners of music making, from the music industry’s most commercially successful acts to grassroots, lo-fi and DIY amateur practice; from composition, collaboration and innovation to funding, distribution and marketing; and from preservation, curation and remediation to the power relations of access and censorship. By 2018, 47% of all music streamed online came through YouTube’s platform; and by 2021, 44% of the American population and 66% of India’s used YouTube to stream music.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to its Own Past* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), 59.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Rosen, “The People Formerly Known as the Audience,” in *The Social Media Reader*, ed. Michael Mandiberg (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 13-16, 15.

<sup>3</sup> IFPI, “Music Consumer Insight Report,” (April 2018), at [https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018\\_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf](https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf); Hoang Nguyen, “The Most Popular Music Streaming Platforms in Key Markets Globally,” in *YouGov* (March 19 2021), at <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/media/articles-reports/2021/03/18/services-used-stream-music-poll>.

In the year after YouTube's launch, two things happened: its slogan changed to "Broadcast Yourself" in recognition of the amount of user-generated material being uploaded; and Google's acquisition of the platform initiated a drive for profitability through increased advertising and the inclusion of more professional content.<sup>4</sup> Despite a subsequent increase in official material, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, writing in 2009, observed that the platform had firmly established itself as a powerful "site of participatory culture" governed by a "diverse group of participants."<sup>5</sup> In fact, they noted that, at the time of writing, "User-created content made up more than two-thirds of the content coded in both the Most Responded and Most Discussed categories, where it comprised 63 and 69 per cent respectively...".<sup>6</sup>

Cybermedia's shift to DIY communicative practices and the rise of "you" as a creative force represents one of the biggest cultural transformations of the century, a shift that Lev Manovich describes as a move from the web as "mostly a publishing medium in the '90s" to a "communication medium" in the noughties.<sup>7</sup> This transference from the publishing of discrete media forms to a more reciprocal, two-way flow of communication was famously addressed during a 2004 conference in which Tim O'Reilly brought Darcy DeNucci's 1999 term "Web 2.0" into popular parlance.<sup>8</sup> Enabled by advances in computer technology and programming techniques that could be shared across platforms, Web 2.0 opened established processes of screen media consumption to user-friendly, interactive modes of engagement. This openness fuelled the rise of global social media, shifted the articulations of popular folk culture, encouraged collaboration and remediation and seemed to promise a citizen-driven space for democratised creativity.

YouTube, the second most visited website in the world after Google, played a key role in shaping the processes and aesthetics of this newly emerging space. On

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<sup>4</sup> José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Digital Media and Society* (2009. Rep. Cambridge: Polity Press 2019), vii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life," in *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 33-44.

<sup>8</sup> "Web 2.0 Conference," conference website, San Francisco, California (October 5-7<sup>th</sup>, 2004), at <https://web.archive.org/web/20050312204307/http://www.web2con.com/web2con>; Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," *oreilly.com* (September 30 2005), at <https://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>.

the one hand, music—as its most viewed form of content—has been a major player in its mutable specificities; on the other, the platform as a “communication medium” has performed a significant role in the transformation of music practice in the twenty-first century. Technology has always occupied a pivotal position in music histories; and it has never, Keith Negus reminds us, “been passive, neutral or natural. Music has for centuries been created through the interaction between ‘art’ and technology.”<sup>9</sup> The evolution of acoustic instruments, sound recording, microphones, amplification and radio and studio equipment has fundamentally restructured creative practice while distribution technologies from cassettes and vinyl to CDs to mp3s opened new opportunities for dissemination, listening and sharing. In his work on popular music, Paul Théberge refers to the democratisation of music making afforded by technology during the twentieth century: David Hesmondhalgh has found these new freedoms at play in the punk and dance music scenes, David Toop in the production of skiffle and dance music, and I’ve located it within early video art-music performance.<sup>10</sup> Others, like Georgina Born, Kyle Devine and Tara Rodgers, have recognised technology’s potential for a re-gendering of music practice.<sup>11</sup>

YouTube slots into this history, not only as a new form of audiovisual dissemination, but also as a space for emerging talent, global connections and remediated material. Notable across all music activity has been a move from the consumption of content to an active and social engagement with its processes and circulation: while users can interact with professional music and music videos through likes, comments and shares, Web 2.0’s transformation into a “communication medium” also enabled amateur musicians and fans to create and

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<sup>9</sup> Keith Negus, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (London: E. Arnold, 1992), 31.

<sup>10</sup> David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1995), 43-44; David Hesmondhalgh, “Punks Attempt to Democratise the Music Industry: The Success and Failure of Rough Trade,” *Popular Music* 16, no. 3 (October 1997): 255-74: 255-274; Paul Théberge, “‘Plugged in’: Technology and Popular Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-25; David Hesmondhalgh, “The British Dance Music Industry: A Case Study of Independent Cultural Production,” *British Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 2 (June 1998): 234–51; Holly Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Holly Rogers, “‘Betwixt and Between’ Worlds: Spatial and Temporal Liminality in Video Art-Music”, in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. Claudia Gorbman, John Richardson and Carol Vernallis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 525-542.

<sup>11</sup> Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noise: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Georgina Born and Kyle Devine, “Music, Technology, Gender, and Class: Digitization, Educational and Social Change in Britain,” *Twentieth-Century Music* 12, no. 2 (August 26, 2015): 135-172.

distribute music and opinion in increasingly open and accessible ways. These direct-to-fan and peer-to-peer channels of transmission generate spaces for outsider music, amateur and collaborative creativity and refreshed forms of music pedagogy. This rise of new and interactive affordances for music culture had implications not only for musicians, the music industry and fans; it has also played a part in destabilising music's traditional gatekeeping structures usually governed by A&R personnel, the music press, music academics, historians, radio and broadcast television, patrons, record shops, museums curators and concert programmers. On YouTube, likes, comments, shares and subscriptions provide a glimpse into what and how music means to certain communities at particular moments in time. The rise of the collective voice and the affinity spaces of micro-genres and forgotten musical moments acts as a decentred and collaborative wade through music history that may challenge traditional processes of music gatekeeping and canon formation. At best, then, YouTube can be seen as a powerful crowd sourced intermediary able to deconstruct and critique the traditional processes of music promotion, history and canonisation.

And yet, countering the digital optimism inherent in readings of the platform as a free and equitable space have been issues of accessibility, censorship and artificial intelligence (AI) that temper a truly free and democratised understanding of music popularity, influence and innovation. In fact, Paul Harkins and Nick Prior voice caution over the “loose deployment” of terms like democratization “to identify technology-led shifts in music making – where the ‘digital’ becomes a short-hand for a flattening of hierarchical structures of genre, access, and production—elides socio-musical change as an uneven and gradual process.”<sup>12</sup> The fundamental dualities of Web 2.0's freedoms and restrictions are exemplified by YouTube, through its combination of user-generated and professional material, its conflicts between freedom of expression and strict copyright laws, and the dissonances between its promoted policies of accessibility and the strict censorship impinged by various countries and cultures. As the most frequently most viewed type of material on YouTube, music offers a powerful insight not only into the ways in which these

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Harkins and Nick Prior, “(Dis)locating Democratization: Music Technologies in Practice,” *Popular Music and Society* (2021): 84.

dualities play out on the platform, but also of the ways in which they influence life beyond online culture.

By way of an introduction to the relationships, antagonisms and interactions between YouTube and musical cultures, this chapter identifies several different forms of YouTube musicking around the millennial turn. While it is impossible to capture the rhizomic complexities of the platform, the focus on the transformations, liberations and troubling of boundaries between musicians and audiences, professional and DIY, grass-roots communities, original and remediated creativity and the live and the recorded embraces the unbounded chaos of “your world”. How do we listen to music on YouTube? What mediations occur in the construction of the platform’s constant generation of audiovisual material? And what do these new modes of listening, creating, interacting and disseminating tell us about how “you” have embraced the possibilities of “your world” in the twenty-first century?

### **“Us”, “Them” and “the bald guy”: The Networked Music Industry**

The mass cyber-dissemination of digital music posed a challenge for the established practices of the record industry. Although only a part of the music industry as a whole, the record industry is one of its largest economic drivers, and the disruptions afforded by music and social media platforms like YouTube, Myspace, Bandcamp, Spotify, Apple Music, Twitter and TikTok necessitated a reconfiguration of established business practices. The MP3 format enabled users to explore new ways of engaging with sonic and audiovisual content and initiated a sharp decline in the production and distribution of physical music artefacts—vinyl records, CDs, cassettes.<sup>13</sup> As a result, record labels had to negotiate ways to bolster their traditional distribution processes and sales revenue not only through official download channels, but also by establishing ways to monetise dematerialised outputs like hits and likes and numbers of subscribers, comments and shares.<sup>14</sup> However, one of the greatest challenges in the move to digital music came from unlicensed streaming and the unauthorised copying and sharing of music through peer-to-peer networks. The industry’s initial response to the challenges of networked

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<sup>13</sup> Ole J. Mjos, *Music, Social Media and Global Mobility: Myspace, Facebook, YouTube* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Steve Collins and Sherman Young, *Beyond 2.0: The Future of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

media was what Martin Lister et al describe as “complex and even chaotic” and Jim Rogers notes how the word “crisis” began swiftly to echo through music industry journalism and scholarship.<sup>15</sup> It’s easy to see why. Although YouTube initiated strict copyright laws on its musical material through the watermarking of video sound and Content ID, using fingerprints that alert content holders to a potential infringement and allowing them to choose a subsequent path of action (as Sylvain Martet discusses in his chapter later in this book), in 2018, an industry report attributed low audio subscription numbers to the illegal downloading of music across the internet, which accounted for 38% of that year’s global music listeners.<sup>16</sup> As we’ve seen, this was also the year that YouTube accounted for almost half of the world’s music streaming and taken together, these two statistics position the platform as a major disruptive force for the record industry: as one listener explained when asked about music fans’ preference for the platform’s extensive free music catalogue, “anything they want to listen to is on YouTube”.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the industry shakeup initiated by the rapid rise of social media was not all gloomy. In fact, the reorganised structures to arise from the “chaos” quickly began to generate new revenue streams for record labels able to augment and coexist with more traditional industry frameworks through social media’s access to local and transnational audiences.<sup>18</sup> A main early concern was the value gap created between the money that YouTube generated from adverts and subscriptions and what made it back to the rights-holders—the record labels, performers, songwriters, composers and music video teams. Copyright issues meant that the industry’s biggest players—Sony, Universal and EMI—initially choose to share their videos with Vevo instead of YouTube, while Warner, after at first removing unauthorized content from the platform, eventually managed to develop a productive and mutually-beneficial working relationship with it. Korean entertainment agencies like JYP Entertainment and YG Entertainment, on the other hand, quickly became official YouTube users, with S.M. launching their YouTube channel to great success

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Lister, John Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant and Kieran Kelly, *New Media: A Critical Introduction – Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 193; Jim Rogers, *The Death & Life of the Music Industry in the Digital Age* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 6-9.

<sup>16</sup> Matt Binder, “YouTube Accounts for 47 Percent of Music Streaming, Study Claims,” *Mashable* (October 10 2018), at <https://mashable.com/article/youtube-47-percent-of-on-demand-music-streaming>.

<sup>17</sup> IFPI, “Music Consumer Insight Report” (2018), at [https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018\\_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf](https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, *The Death & Life of the Music Industry in the Digital Age*, 24.

in March 2006.<sup>19</sup> It wasn't until 2021, though, that a fundamental shift saw a redistribution of revenue so that labels and artists not only received a cut of the advertising income, but also a proportion of the subscription funds to YouTube Music and YouTube Premium, a shift that resulted in over \$4 billion paid to music creators in the year preceding June 2021.<sup>20</sup> However, critics have noted the issues of unpaid labour and the fair remuneration of all users, remixers and unsigned artists that contribute to frameworks from which YouTube generate income.<sup>21</sup>

One of these new revenue streams is directly related to YouTube's primary quality: it is a platform for *audiovisual* media and provides record labels with the opportunity to augment the reach of MTV and related broadcast television channels by disseminating music videos across global networked communities, either as isolated uploads or, more often, via the official channels of particular musicians, directors or labels. Since YouTube's inception, music video has consistently made up a sizeable proportion of its most popular content. In fact, so great was the demand that, in 2015, the platform launched YouTube Music Key that offered subscribers official videos without ads; while this didn't take off as hoped, it relaunched shortly after as the much more successful YouTube Music. Despite a pandemic-related surge in DIY content (how-to tutorials, vlogs, opinion pieces, ASMR and so on), as of August 2021, music videos still topped the platform's most viewed lists, with "Baby Shark Dance" (Pinkfong Kids's Songs and Stories) receiving 9.2 billion views, followed by "Despacio" (Luis Fonsi ft. Daddy Yankee) with 7.5 million views. In fact, of the top 10 videos, 8 are music videos, including Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You" (5.43 billion views) and Mark Ronson ft. Bruno Mars' "Uptown Funk" (4.27 billion views).<sup>22</sup> Of the next 20 most-viewed items (as of November 2 2021) all but two are professional music videos (and those two are also music related in the form of visualised children's rhymes). K-Pop acts have used YouTube's global reach and possibilities for transnational circulation to particular

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<sup>19</sup> Doobo Shim and Kwang Woo Noh, "YouTube and Girls' Generation Fandom," *The Journal of the Korea Contents Association* 12, no.1 (January 2012): 125-137.

<sup>20</sup> Shira Ovide, "YouTube Isn't the Music Villain Anymore," *The New York Times* (June 8 2021), at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/technology/youtube-music-industry.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labour," in *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 73-97; Byrd McDaniel, "Popular Music Reaction Videos: Reactivity, Creator Labor, and the Performance of Listening Online," *New Media and Society* (2020): 1625-1626.

<sup>22</sup> Statista.com, "Most Popular YouTube Videos Based on Total Global Views as of August 2021" (4 April 2022), at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/249396/top-youtube-videos-views/>.



effect, with Girls' Generation dominating video figures on the platform and South Korean rapper Psy erupting onto the world stage with the unprecedented success of his 2013 song "Gangnam Style" (figure 2), although his success was tempered by what Sue Collins refers to as "dispensable celebrity" culture tempered by regressive stereotypes and problematic race judgements.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, when BTS dropped their music video for "Dynamite" on Big Hit's YouTube channel on August the 20<sup>th</sup> 2020, it broke all records to become the most viewed YouTube video in the first 24 hours after racking up 101.1 million views on its launch day alone.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

While the major music industry players and YouTube battled it out for a collaborative approach to ownership and remuneration, musicians also found their traditional processes challenged. Although official music videos have been an important promotional tool since their exponential rise to popularity during the 1980s, YouTube provides an important participatory extension to their professional boundaries and one-way flow of information in several important ways. One of the most notable changes was the provision of a space that allows musicians to engage in a range of direct-to-fan activities and thus mobilise audiences in new ways. The opportunity for fans to interact with musical content through likes, comments, shares, remixes, versions and parodies not only provided new ways of interacting with music and musicians, but also reconfigured the role of the audience within music culture in general. While official artists rarely interact with their comments, they nevertheless encourage the development of various musical communities able to generate massive hits, comments and replies themselves, not only further promoting the artist, but also the profile of various YouTubers. A good example of this is popular Swedish YouTuber and musician SethEverman's sardonic "i'm the bald guy" comment under Billie Eilish's "Bad Guy" video (2019) that has received over 3.2 million likes (as of 3 March 2022). The power of YouTube's musical communities to generate interest in certain events has also been instrumental in opening an alternate route for amateur

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<sup>23</sup> Shim and Noh, "YouTube and Girls' Generation Fandom," 125-137; Brian Hu "RIP Gangman Style," in *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Nornes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 229-244; Sue Collins, "Making the Most out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV's Dispensable Celebrity," *Television & New Media* 9, no. 2 (January 16, 2008): 87-110.

musicians into the industry. Since its beginning, for instance, numerous music careers have been launched on the platform, including Justin Bieber's, whose 2007 amateur recordings of R&B covers were discovered by a talent scout, The Weeknd, whose YouTube videos, which initially withheld his real name and image, launched him into international stardom in 2011, Lana Del Rey, whose mixture of home videos and internet clips in her homemade video for her debut song "Video Games" (2011) became an instant viral hit, and Nathan Evans, the Glaswegian postal worker whose traditional singing kickstarted a sudden cultural frenzy for sea shanties in 2021. In response to the changing processes of the music industry, YouTube launched its Musicians Wanted program (March 2010), using the success of Pomplamoose, a Californian Indie duo, who used the platform to upload pop covers in "video songs" and extensive footage of the backstage workings and track production to encourage unsigned acts and indie bands to apply; if successful they could upload music videos and information to the channel in order to dramatically increase their exposure while also receiving money for their work: the key was that the songs must be audiovisual—music videos not stills or promo shots (Pomplamoose member Jack Conte later went on to form Patreon).

Although early YouTube users distinguished between official, commercial YouTube channels and DIY uploads, two sides they labelled "us" (or "you") and "them", then, the rapid improvement in, and access to, technology, along with schemes like YouTube's Partnership Program (2007), the YouTube Creator Academy (2013) and YouTube For Artists (2015), saw amateur content and its modes of dissemination and monetisation become increasingly professionalized.<sup>24</sup> In their chapter later in this volume, Carol Vernallis, Laura McLaren, Virginia Kuhn and Martin P. Rossouw use lyric videos to explore the intersections between fan-made content and more professional interpretations of music videos, noting how differences are increasingly difficult to find. In fact, fan videos are often uploaded to musician's official channels, while many artists, like Lil Nas X, now make their own remediated versions.

Conversely, professional and established musicians rapidly found themselves having to move into DIY territory to transmedially augment their album releases and

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<sup>24</sup> Dana Rotman and Jennifer Preece, "The 'WeTube' in YouTube: Creating an Online Community Through Video Sharing," *International Journals of Web-Based Communities* 6, no. 3 (2010): 325.

maintain fan engagement in bespoke and personal ways. Where before, musician activities around record releases included live performances, interviews, zines and record shop appearances, YouTube opened up new and interactive paratextual possibilities which reconfigured what Jessica Eblom refers to as the “work of a musician”: “nowadays, it resembles more that of a skilled entrepreneur in the gig economy. Social media is seen as the recipe for musicians’ entrepreneurial success—it is absolutely necessary to be on social media and interact in order to build up an audience”.<sup>25</sup> While the most successful artists’ YouTube channels are often controlled to some extent by their record company (Beyoncé’s channel, for instance, offers only professional and official music videos, interviews and live footage), for others, the platform offers a real opportunity for direct—if mediated—fan communication.<sup>26</sup> As we shall see in Emily Thomas’ chapter later in this book, Lil Nas X has created complex transmedial stories that augment and continue the narrative of his music videos in ways that confuse the boundaries between art and life. We can also see this confusion at play in the work of vlogging musicians. In his chapter, Juri Giannini explores the rise of the “digital artist” who performs not for live audiences, but for social media screens, breaking musical forms into short snippets in line with cybermedia’s promotion of fragmentation and impact: he calls these fragments musical selfies. Concert pianist Tiffany Poon, for instance, uses her YouTube channel in an extremely personal way to foreground her process of practice and aesthetic decision making in order to demystify her performance aura, while also monetising her videos.<sup>27</sup> While Poon considers herself a performer rather than a YouTuber, TwoSetViolin quit their careers as professional performers to devote themselves to YouTube content, amassing over 2.81 million subscribers to their channel with their mixture of information, demonstration and comedic sketches about their instrument and its repertoire.<sup>28</sup> Singer-songwriter Jensen McRae, on the

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<sup>25</sup> Jessica Edlom, “Authenticity and Digital Popular Music Brands,” in *Popular Music, Technology, and the Changing Media Ecosystem: From Cassettes to Stream*, ed. Tomas Tofalvy and Emília Barna (London: Palgrave, 2020), 132.

<sup>26</sup> Beyonce YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/c/beyonce/>.

<sup>27</sup> Ricardo Pereira, “Tiffany Poon Vlogging the Life of a Classical Concert Pianist: How Can YouTube ‘Peel Back the Curtain on Classical Music’”, “Like, Share and Subscribe: YouTube, Music and Cyberculture Before and After the New Decade”, Conference, Lisbon Portugal (October 1-3 2020).

<sup>28</sup> TwoSetViolin YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/user/twosetviolin>.

other hand, uses her YouTube channel for fan interaction, posting frequent vlogs and Q&A content (figure 3).<sup>29</sup>

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

However, such personalised insights into private lives and the direct interaction with fans has a dark side. While users can hide behind anonymity and usernames to troll and intimidate musicians, others are lured by the illusion of presence into difficult and complicated attachments. Referring to Nancy Baym's observation that cybermedia has encouraged audiences to consider musicians as their friends, Edlom continues: "Culture, economics, and technology push musicians toward authenticity and closeness. Audiences 'expect artists to be constantly available to them, offering unique, personal glimpses of off-stage life.'"<sup>30</sup> While other platforms like Twitter and Instagram might lend themselves more easily to this closeness of communication, YouTube's focus on the moving-image has seen a rise of intrusive parasocial interactions.

### **"The Wisdom of the Crowds": The New Cultural Gatekeepers of Music**

As we have seen, fans, music lovers and collectors play an important role in the curation of YouTube's musical spaces. But they also contribute reappropriated and new content themselves. Countering the pre-recorded and heavily edited nature of many official music videos and their paratexts on YouTube is a vast reservoir of amateur live music performance capture. While there has always been a market for live music bootlegs—The Grateful Dead famously encouraged concert goers to record their concerts—mobile phones and cameras enabled an explosion of videoed gig footage and YouTube quickly became a depository for multiple perspectives and subjective viewpoints. On the one hand, official concert footage, like Adele's live version of "Set Fire to the Rain" from the Royal Albert Hall (November 16, 2011) which boasts almost 7 million views to date, can help record labels to promote an artist beyond record sales; on the other, amateur footage of performances offer

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<sup>29</sup> Jensen McRae YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZTnNKbAAoWx2eIQEfrvN1Q>.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy K. Baym, *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection* (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 171; Edlom, "Authenticity and Digital Popular Music Brands," 133.

multiple viewpoints and audience reactions, capturing personal and ephemeral musical moments into a crowd-sourced historical archive.<sup>31</sup>

Simon Reynolds describes this chaotic and compulsive sharing as a collective memory bank: “A profound shift has taken place in which YouTube serves as both major player and potent symbol: the astronomic expansion of humanity’s resources of memory. We have available to us, as individuals, but also at the level of civilisation, immensely more ‘space’ to fill with memorabilia, documentation, recordings, every kind of archival trace of our existence.”<sup>32</sup> In musicological terms, this provides a rich resource that marks a move from what Carolyn Abbate refers to as a drastic (event-based) rather than gnostic (knowledge-based) treatment of music performance: the shift from an analytical treatment of music to one that is an ephemeral, changeable and site-specific act (a drastic reading), where difference and mistakes between performances situate music as a living, volatile, fragile and exciting process; and one that brings the audience into an integral position not only as documentarians, but also as curators of what is valuable and what dispensable. The proliferation of viewpoints affords insights to different perspectives: what has each user decided to focus on and for how long, how is the audience behaving and what unique or unusual events have been captured that may evidence what Abbate calls the “exceptional phenomenal presence” and “drastic” effects of music.<sup>33</sup> The multiple fan footage uploads of Lady Gaga falling from the stage during her 2019 Las Vegas residency offers insight into all of these potentialities, for instance. YouTube, then, plays a vital role in preservation, accessibility and new journeys through related material, including paratexts not normally available in established retail outlines like live footage, imports, bootlegs, versions, B-sides, demos and remixes, as well as portals into microgenres, unknown related material and access to obscure artists and releases that would not have made it into well-known industry outlets. These forms of social interactions, and the community-driven processes of fandom and storytelling augment previous zine cultures by opening up accessible and interactive affinity spaces, which Sean Duncan and Elisabeth Hayes’s (2012) define as “the

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<sup>31</sup> As of 10.11.2021, the figure stands at 676,161,528 views. Adele, “Set Fire to the Rain (Live at the Albert Hall),” YouTube video, 3:58, November 16 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ri7-vnrJD3k&t=6s>.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, *Retromania*, 56.

<sup>33</sup> Carolyn Abbate, “Music – Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505-436.

physical, virtual, or combinations of locations where people come together around a shared affinity (interest).”<sup>34</sup>

Much of the niche material that resides at the end of YouTube’s long tails will not be widely heard, of course; nor will it be listened to attentively.<sup>35</sup> And this has a lot to do with the ways in which we engage with the platform. In 2011, Nicholas Carr derisively referred to internet browsing as “the shallows”, where attention is constantly distracted by new content and focus is distributed across the never-ending flow of information. Engagement with the internet, he argued, has rewired our brains to engage only superficially with material encountered online, often because it is consumed while multitasking.<sup>36</sup> In his **chapter later in this book**, João Francisco Porfírio notes how YouTube’s “domestic sonic videos” are used to soundtrack normal domestic activities, for instance. But John Palfrey talks more benevolently of an oscillation between “grazing” and “deep dive” for digital natives, or those born into a digital world.<sup>37</sup> This oscillation between attentive and shallow engagement is important to the ways in which YouTube can be used as a musicological tool.

The platform not only gives access to content, but also to the ways in which the content has been delivered, viewed, used, circulated and engaged with: and, as Steven Colburn has shown in his exploration of YouTube’s concert footage videos, those who film and upload live music to the platform position themselves as important cultural intermediaries.<sup>38</sup> It follows that YouTube’s affinity spaces harbour significant information about music histories and the ways in which they are constructed. While it’s important to temper digital optimism with the reality that many major labels and managers tightly control YouTube’s official channels and cleverly play its algorithms (later in this book, Vinícius Jonas de Aguiar explores how the platform’s algorithms promote sameness to keep you watching and listening for

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<sup>34</sup> Elisabeth R. Hayes and Sean C. Duncan, “Expanding the Affinity Space: An Introduction,” in *Learning in Video Game Affinity Spaces: New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies*, ed. Elisabeth R. Hayes and Sean C. Duncan (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 1-23.

<sup>35</sup> Chris Anderson coined the term “long-tail” in 2004 to describe how the internet has prompted a shift away from businesses selling a relatively small number of popular products to mass customers to one in which hard-to-find items, available only in small numbers, can generate significant profits: Chris Anderson, “The Long Tail,” *Wired* 12 (October 1 2004), at <https://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail/>.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Steven Colburn, “Filming Concerts for YouTube: Seeking Recognition in the Pursuit of Cultural Capital,” *Popular Music and Society* 38, no. 1 (2015): 59–72.

longer), the platform's cacophony of voices and opinions go some way towards destabilising the closely monitored, traditional processes of canon formation and the leadership roles of music's established gatekeepers—musicologists, historians, record labels, broadcast TV, radio, music venues, music magazines, museums, AR personnel, DJs and record shop owners. There are several ways in which this can happen.

As a crowd-sourced depository, YouTube harbours unique data about reception history and acts as a powerful barometer for public opinion. Likes, shares and remediations indicate popular cultural sensibilities, while comments allow the public to voice their opinion in sometimes surprising ways. In their chapter later in this book, Alexandra Lamont, Scott Bannister and Eduardo Coutinho explore the different modes of social engagement operable in YouTube comments which, unlike straight data on viewing numbers and so on, reveals reactions and emotional engagement with the content. Exploring what they refer to as “the interconnected networks of listeners online”, the authors highlight how cultural references are revealed through various types of emotional vocabulary. Eamonn Bell, in his chapter, approaches the topic from a different angle, using computing models to analyse critical time coded comments and turn them into a musicological tool to see how YouTubers talk about, critique and share musical moments with the wider community. What is needed, he argues, is not new forms of analysis, but new methods.

Content is also important: parodies and mashups point to significant cultural moments, the longtail reveals information about the longevity of certain artists and musics, and video essays, lyric videos and reaction videos draw attention to tropes that are dominating the current critical landscape. In some ways, the platform perpetuates the classics. In July 2018, for instance, Guns N'Roses' “November Rain” (1992) became the first music video made prior to the advent of YouTube to reach a billion views, while a version of Vivaldi's Four Seasons (uploaded January 30<sup>th</sup> 2011) has enjoyed almost 238 million views and gathered over 62,000 comments.<sup>39</sup> But it can also propel artists to success directly from user interest, as we saw above. The

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Christopher, “Guns n' Roses' ‘November Rain’ is the First Video to Top 1 Billion YouTube Views,” *Loudwire* (July 16 2018), at <https://loudwire.com/guns-n-roses-november-rain-first-90s-video-1-billion-views-youtube/>; Evan Bennett, “Four Seasons – Vivaldi”, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRxofEmo3HA&t=396s>, YouTube video, 41:59, January 30 2011,

viewing figures for the various music videos mentioned above provide useful insight into public opinion not only for individual musicians and bands, but also for the overarching engagement with certain styles and trends: between October and December 2020, hip-hop was the most-viewed music genre on YouTube, while in 2021, hip-hop musicians occupied all ten spots on the ten most-viewed artists in the U.S.<sup>40</sup>

All this information reveals what certain musical communities find interesting and worth preserving or re-circulating at a particular cultural moment.

Folksonomies—the user-generated process of tagging material in order to classify and curate it into searchable or related themes—operate as a useful research tool here. In their work on the discovery of Independent music online, Michael Gaffney and Pauline Raffety note that:

social networking sites and music folksonomies offer ways of making the Long Tail more visible.... New genres for music appear regularly from “micro-house” to “cuddlecore” and it may be that folksonomies, with their adaptability, can better account for this rapidly changing vocabulary than a controlled vocabulary.<sup>41</sup>

Music folksonomies operate as powerful negotiators of themes and styles because, as James Surowiecki writes, they harness “the wisdom of crowds,” which positions “You” as a collaborative musicological curator of music’s many narratives and histories.<sup>42</sup>

YouTube, then, operates as a cultural lens into contemporary music cultures. But it can also provide a forum for direct political engagement, often in the form of citizen journalism; that is, when independent journalists, and member of the public, record and / or report on particular events and upload their footage to social media sites for quick dissemination and reportage.<sup>43</sup> While examples of major news events hitting YouTube have been well documented—the video of a UCLA student being tasered by campus police in November 2006, for instance, or the shooting of Oscar Grant in a subway station on 1 January 2009—sonic examples are often left out of

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<sup>40</sup> Ashley King, “The Most Popular Music Genre of 2020 Was Easily Hip-Hop,” *Digital Music News* (April 1 2021), at <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2021/04/01/youtube-music-top-hip-hop-songs/>.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Gaffney and Pauline Raffety, “Making the Long Tail Visible: Social Networking Sites and Independent Music Discovery,” *Program* 43, no. 4 (2009): 376.

<sup>42</sup> James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of the Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Joke Hermes’ definition of “cultural citizenship” is as follows: “the process of bonding and community building, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticising offered in the realm of (popular) culture.” Joke Hermes, *Rereading Popular Culture* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 10.



the discourse; and yet their role not only in demonstrating the public's reactions to events, but also in mobilising groups of people in real time, can be extremely powerful.<sup>44</sup>

<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

When Israeli-American music video director Alma Har'el recorded a group of women singing together in the 2017 Women's March on Washington, for instance, it became an instant viral video and unofficial anthem for the march. The women, led by MILCK and singing a multipart acapella version of her song "Quiet" (released a year later in 2018), had rehearsed online, via Skype, and came together from all over the country to perform it for the first time during the march: the video was then uploaded to YouTube as a pedagogical resource for other groups of women (figure 4).<sup>45</sup> Other examples have directly intervened into political events and their coverage. Áine Mangaoang's work, for instance, focuses on the Philippian penal system's use of pop music, dance and YouTube as part of a rehabilitation process to show the power of a viral video to generate significant cultural and political intervention: Guilnard Moufarrej's research into the uploading of protest songs performed by Syrian children to social media initiated a new type of exploitative war propaganda and misrepresentation.<sup>46</sup> These examples show how YouTube's music has become part of our cultural practices, allowing social and political networks to come together and share information, or to promote viewpoints as a form of propaganda, unmediated by the laws of network coverage. In their chapter on music tourism in the Global South, Ofer Gazit and Elisa Bruttomesso trace this flow of influence the other way, exploring how the locations of popular music videos have

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<sup>44</sup> Burgess and Green, however, point out that material in the Most Viewed category tends to refer to news stories already making headlines rather than launching breaking news items: Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 75; Mary Grace Antony and Ryan J. Thomas, "This is Citizen Journalism at its Finest: YouTube and the Public Sphere in the Oscar Grant Shooting Incident," *New Media & Society* 12, no. 4 (2010): 1280-1296.

<sup>45</sup> Almaharel, "#IcantKeepQuiet #Anthem in the Women's March on Washington," YouTube video, 2:50, January 23 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLvlw8J8sWE>.

<sup>46</sup> Áine Mangaoang, *Dangerous Mediations: Pop Music in a Philippine Prison Video* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021); Guilnard Moufarrej, "Protest Songs, Social Media and the Exploitation of Syrian Children," in *Songs of Social Protest: International Perspectives*, ed. Aileen Dillane, Martin J. Power, Eoin Devereux and Amanda Haynes (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International), 354-370.

become problematic but also positive sites of tourism that can either stereotype or rejuvenate a particular location.

### **Reviews, Opinion and Music Learning**

In all of these examples, user-generated content and the participation around it generated powerful social and political commentary. In 2012, Michael Mandiberg noted that sites like YouTube “are pointless without audience participation: from the audience’s perspective, in order to experience the site you *have to become a media producer*, and from the organizer’s perspective, without audience production their site will fail”: “While old forms coexist with these new audience-driven forms and hybrids of the two, media participation is now part of media consumption”.<sup>47</sup>

YouTube’s spread of music activity into rhizomic paratexts and fan-driven affinity spaces revitalised the social and artistic spaces of musicians and fans as well as those of enthusiasts and learners, opening up new opportunities for “media participation” with musical material through the platform’s audiovisual tools.

Journalistic videos—like music review channel ARTV and AJayll’s videos—and cultural video essays about music—such as those found on Adam Neely’s video channel—deliver musical commentary and opinion that can provide access to, and inform, the public’s opinion of different kinds of music, while more pedagogical channels provide how-to tutorials for particular instruments, styles and techniques, critical theory and music history.<sup>48</sup> Bradfrey’s channel, for example, offers score-based analysis of film music, while Nahre Sol’s videos filter a variety of musical styles through an art-music lens. Both channels offer augmented blended learning environments for children and students as well as for the interested public.<sup>49</sup> The popularity of channels such as these provides useful insight into current music trends: which instruments are most popular (at the time of writing, guitar, piano, violin, drums and music production), which genres are the most sought after and

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Mandiberg, “Introduction,” in *The Social Media Reader*, 1, 2.

<sup>48</sup> ARTV, YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/user/AlbumReviewTV/videos>; AJayll, *Music: On; World: Off* YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6EkU9ytxtY6AEk1U4jhWbg/videos>; Bradfrey’s film music YouTube channel, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk\\_jzTmW2Fmfnm70c2kZHpQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk_jzTmW2Fmfnm70c2kZHpQ); Adam Neely, YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnkp4xDOWqqJD7sSM3xdUiQ>.

<sup>49</sup> Nahre Sol, YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8R8FRt1KcPiR-rtAflXmeg>; Kari K. Veblen and Nathan B. Kruse, “Children’s Musical Play in a Digital Era,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning*, ed. Janice L. Waldron, Stephanie Horsley and Kari K. Veblen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 529-548.

which pieces are the most viewed. In his chapter, João Ricardo explores the different and innovative forms of composition pedagogy that exist on YouTube from official university courses and orchestra outreach programmes to the pedagogy of professional YouTubers and the DIY sharing of ideas and resources between users. Like music composition, the opportunity to run classes online can be lucrative for the teachers. Marty Schwartz's guitar channel Marty Music, for instance, receives over 7 million views a month, reportedly drawing him hundreds of thousands of dollars.<sup>50</sup> In his companion piece to Ricardo's chapter, John Moore draws attention to the new synergies forming between music analysis YouTubers and those working on music theory from within higher education institutions.

Anabel Quan-Haase identifies several possible online pedagogical interactions ranging from self-directed to community-based musical learning, with student-expert interactions, peer-to-peer learning, networks, role models and serendipity all playing a major role.<sup>51</sup> Much has been made of the pedagogically democratic spaces that YouTube provides for users who may not have access to in-person music tuition for socio-economic, geographic or political reasons, or prefer to learn in a self-directed way. But it's not just focused pedagogical videos that help users develop their musicianship: Janice Waldon et al. also note the importance of observing other people's musical performances in learning instruments and stagecraft.<sup>52</sup> While there remains concern that the one-way flow of information delivered by pre-recorded tutorials does not allow for the level of feedback and interaction necessary for high-level performance, the platform's free tutorials have generated a new wave of accomplished musicians, and in 2019, London's Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance confirmed that several successful applicants had taught themselves to play via online tutorials.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Marty Music, YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmnlTWVJysiWPFiZhQ5uudg>; Michelle Castillo, "Teaching 'Stairway to Heaven' on YouTube Earns This Guitar Instructor Six Figures Annually," *CNBC* (September 9 2018), at <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/09/youtube-guitar-lessons-turned-into-6-figure-career-for-marty-schwartz.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Anabel Quan-Haase, "Social and Informational Affordances of Social Media in Music Learning and Teaching," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning*, 427-442.

<sup>52</sup> Janice L. Waldron, Stephanie Horsley and Kari K Veblen, "Introduction: Why Should We Care About Social Media," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning*, 1-20.

<sup>53</sup> Eleanor Harding and Elliot Mulligan, "Beat It! Music Teachers are Being Replaced by YouTube as Pupils Ditch Face to Face Instrument Tuition for Online Videos, Experts Say," *Daily Mail* (26 October 2019), at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7615529/Beat-Music-teachers-replaced-YouTube.html>.

### **“Broadcast Yourself”: Producers and Collaboration**

Social media sites like YouTube are designed, notes Manovich, “to be customized by the users”.<sup>54</sup> So far, the boundary collapse between “media consumption” and “media production” identified by Mandiberg above has been identified in user reaction through comments and likes, direct-to-fan modes of communication and pedagogical forms. If we now return to “you” as a vehicle for innovation, it becomes clear that one of the most innovative results of YouTube’s user customisation arises from the refreshed forms of co-creativity it affords. This can happen in two main ways: through collaboration or by fusing the roles of producing and using—a merging that Axel Bruns refers to as “producers”—that allows users to generate and manipulate their own online material.<sup>55</sup> Musical collaborations can be seen throughout the history of the platform with examples like the 2009 YouTube Symphony Orchestra, paving the way for large-scale teamwork. The ensemble was the first collaborative online orchestra, made up of 96 professional and amateur musicians from 30+ countries on six continents and including 26 different instruments. In April of that year, they performed the “Internet Symphony ‘Eroica’” by film composer Tan Dun at Carnegie Hall, mixing on-site musicians with a live mash-up of other performers, all playing in real time (see the cover of this book). Live and interactive performances from multiple locations became a common phenomenon during lockdown with concerts like Lady Gaga’s benefit concert, *One World: Together at Home* (18 April 2020, simulcast on broadcast TV) streaming artists like The Rolling Stones performing together from their individual homes via split screen, or Ben Morales Frost’s Lockdown Orchestra, made up of 150 musicians from six continents: their debut concert was uploaded to YouTube on March 27 2020 (figure 5).<sup>56</sup>

<INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE>

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<sup>54</sup> Manovich, “The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life,” 37.

<sup>55</sup> Axel Bruns, “Producers: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content Creation,” in *Proceedings of 6th ACM SIGCHI Conference on Creativity and Cognition*, ed. B Shneiderman (New York: ACM Press, 2007), 99-105.

<sup>56</sup> “One World: Together at Home – Digital Show”, YouTube video, 5:59.55, April 18 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTd5Trp1pbg>; Ben Morales Frost, “Lockdown Orchestra – Flight Fantastic”, YouTube video, 3:35, 27 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Akcok8TIK5c>.

The nature of collaboration has always been a thorny issue marred by ideas of authorship and control, particularly prevalent in the film industry and the overpowering presence of the director as an auteurist voice. Recent work by Carol Vernallis, Lisa Perrott and myself to decentre the authorial voice and take into consideration the distributed authorship of fiction film (not only to include composers and sound artists, but also costume designers, editors, script writers scenographers, sound recordists, casting agents, location scouts) to reposition film as a site of great collaborative venture has gone some way towards noting audiovisual media as a collaborative form not just for performance but also for the composition of audio and visual content.<sup>57</sup> This can happen at both the grass roots level and through large-scale, funded projects like Kevin MacDonald's crowd-sourced documentary *Life in a Day* (2011), which was premiered live on YouTube (there has since been a new film, recorded in 2020).<sup>58</sup> People from all over the world were encouraged to record their everyday lives on 24 July 2010 and to send the footage into the production team, who sifted through the material and edited it into a linear narrative that moved from sunrise to sunset via interlocking stories from across the world. Matthew Herbert, one of the film's two composers, created his soundtrack in a similar way, issuing a request via YouTube for users to send in specific sounds that he could collect together and manipulate into the film's soundscape (figure 6).<sup>59</sup> This form of crowd-sourced composition has become increasingly popular. Gathering sounds from a variety of users became the mainstay of YouTube personality and music producer Andrew Huang, for instance, who, for WWF-Canada's 2012 Earth Hour, created a song from user-contributed lyrics, sounds and videos.<sup>60</sup> And yet, in these examples so far, collaboration and the democratisation of process has been tempered by an overarching organising voice, be it Tan Dun as the composer for the YouTube Orchestra or Herbert as sound and music designer for *Life in a Day*. In their research on YouTube collaboration, Adam Hyde et al. have noted that the etymology of the word is literally "working together" and that there is a "delicate and significant line

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<sup>57</sup> Carol Vernallis, Holly Rogers and Lisa Perrott, *Transmedia Directors: Artistry, Industry and New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> *Life in a Day*, "Life in a Day 2010 Film", YouTube video, 1:34:56, January 21 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFVr\\_cJJIY&t=2027s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFVr_cJJIY&t=2027s).

<sup>59</sup> Lifeinaday, "How You can Build the Soundtrack to *Life in A Day*," YouTube video, 3:17, July 20 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46de7qPgcyq&t=3s>.

<sup>60</sup> WWF-Canada, "WWF Earth Hour Anthem 'When the lights go down by Andrew Huang,'" YouTube video, 03:42, March 28 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmwqfAFscaQ>.

between ‘working with’ and being put to work by’...”<sup>61</sup> It could be argued that, in the examples above, such a system of authorial control leads to problematic forms of labour division and unpaid, unrecognised compositional work.

<INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE>

While the result, although crowd-sourced, is more of a collage than a collaboration, other musicians have sought a more transformative process. Working within the social constraints of the pandemic, Jacob Collier and Charli XCX embraced the possibilities for collaborative creativity in their fan-driven lockdown albums, for instance. Both Collier and Charli XCX invited contributions from fans, offering real time conversations and feedback and foregrounding their collaborative processes in their videos, going some way towards a more interactive form of teamwork, where the content undergoes a process of transformation and muddled authorship as it is passed back and forth.

### **“Take On Me”: Internet Music, Mashups and Fanvids**

Fan involvement, participation and the promotion of DIY, peer-produced and user-generated content quickly became the mainstay of YouTube, placing it at the heart of what Henry Jenkins has referred to as a contemporary digital world governed by a form of “convergence culture”, in which media forms collide and constantly re-articulate one other.<sup>62</sup> Above, we noted the antagonistic yet converging audiovisual vocabularies and styles produced by “us” and “them”: of amateur and official content. While DIY users have moved towards professional modes of articulation due to the creative availabilism afforded by social media’s technological accessibility, some professional users have moved into the paratextual DIY spaces of direct-to-fan engagement. However, research into the content of YouTube’s videos has found that amateur uploads are increasingly characterised by the recycling of professionally-copied content and the rise of what John Hartley calls “redactive creativity”, by which the revision, adaptation and recontextualization of pre-existent materials takes centre

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<sup>61</sup> Adam Hyde, Mike Linksvayer, Kanarinka, Michael Mandiberg, Marta Peirano, Sissu Tarka, Astra Taylor, Alan Toner and Mushon Zer-Aviv, “What is Collaboration Anyway?,” in *The Social Media Reader*, 60.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 290.

stage.<sup>63</sup> In terms of music, “redactive creativity” turns the content and tools of the internet itself into compositional material and process. Internet music, like hypnagogic pop, chillwave and hauntological sounds, is a good example here. These forms use existing online sounds to craft new, highly-self-reflexive music.<sup>64</sup> Artists like Macintosh Plus plunder, chop and screw and slowdown smooth jazz, lounge and elevator music into the internet genre of Vaporwave, for instance: Vaporwave’s sounds are often combined with graphics taken from and imitating early internet and web culture, anime and 3D Objects.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, musicians like Oneohtrix Point Never play with and highlight online material through remediation to create what Reynolds calls cybermedial “echo-jams”.<sup>66</sup>

Web 2.0 design enables websites and networks deeply engrained with what O-Reilly refers to as the possibility for “‘hackability’ and ‘remixability’” that enables direct and unmediated forms of human interaction.<sup>67</sup> While internet music reformulates audiovisual samples, YouTube’s most common form of produsage can be found in its cacophony of sound-image mashups, memes and versions. Closely linked with the move towards sampling in early hip-hop and electronica, the reconfiguration of existing content on YouTube opened out sonic experimentation to more audiovisual possibilities. Reynolds notes that internet mashups and collages can be seen as a natural extension of YouTube’s endless flow of disjunctive material, where playlists invite unexpected juxtapositions of material and style and lead us into a “brittle and inconsistent” sense of temporality.<sup>68</sup> Jonas de Aguiar’s chapter takes on these issues to explore how we might curate our way through the tangle of networked listening and complicates the autonomy of this process.

Fanvids and user-produced mashups of previously uploaded material reveal YouTube as a site of content ready for creative plunder. In a way, this makes the content subject to a collaborative process, although mashups act more like Chinese whispers as material is passed from user to user, undergoing manipulation with each re-upload. Although our second volume of *YouTube and Music* focuses on the

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<sup>63</sup> Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 119; John Hartley, *Television Truths: Forms of Knowledge in Popular Culture* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 112.

<sup>64</sup> Georgina Born and Christopher Haworth, “From Microsound to Vaporwave: Internet-Medicated Musics, Online Methods, and Genre,” *Music and Letters* 98, no. 4 (November 2017): 601–647.

<sup>65</sup> Immortalyear, “Macintosh Plus – Floral Shoppe (FULL ALBUM!!!),” YouTube video, 38:15, December 25 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCq0P509UL4>.

<sup>66</sup> Reynolds, *Retromania*, 80.

<sup>67</sup> Lev Manovich, “The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life,” 39.

<sup>68</sup> Reynolds, *Retromania*, 61.

platform's numerous sonic remediations, it's worth noting several of the most influential types here.<sup>69</sup> Early on, the relative ease of manipulating downloaded material led to an explosion of mashed material, with many examples becoming highly influential commentaries on the original material. The process, of course, goes back to the beginning of moving image media, with the advent of montage, where a story is told through juxtaposed fragments, a process first articulated theoretically by Sergei Eisenstein.<sup>70</sup> While in film, montage usually manipulates original material in the service of a narrative, its appropriation through social media as collage, *détournement*, supercuts and found footage mashups allows users to find connections between a variety of sources. This can either happen through the recombination of a visual text with a musical one, as in *The Dark Side of the Rainbow*—a mashup of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* with *The Wizard of Oz*—or between musical texts, as in *The Grey Album*, Dangermouse's 2004 fusion of Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with The Beatles' *The White Album* and its subsequent collaged visualisation by Ramon & Pedro.<sup>71</sup>

In his early work on audiovisual mashup culture, Nicholas Cook notes a similarity to multimedia art, in which the combination of distinct elements creates “continuous collisions or negotiations among heterogeneous elements, giving rise to meanings that are emergent, unpredictable, and frequently ineffable”:<sup>72</sup> “With all mashups, we experience each song through the other: in what I see as a basic principle of multimedia, the commensurability in certain parameters between the songs that make the mashup musically viable has at the same time the effect of throwing into relief the elements of acoustic, visual, and semantic friction between them”.<sup>73</sup> “Semantic friction” often produces humour, but it can also generate hard-hitting political commentary: electronic music duo Cassetteboy, for instance, plays with fragments and reassigns meaning in their heady mashups of government speeches. In 2008, their first YouTube upload went viral with its scathing and

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<sup>69</sup> Holly Rogers, Joana Freitas and João Francisco Porfírio, *YouTube and Music: Remix, Mashup and Remediation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).

<sup>70</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, Richard Taylor and Michael Glenny, *Towards a Theory of Montage: Sergei Eisenstein Selected Works Volume 2* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Brady Turner, “Home Made Movie – Dark Side of the Rainbow”, YouTube video, 1:46:35, October 1 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBamli0tIRg>; Axel, “Danger Mouse – The Grey Album (2004)”, YouTube video, 44:46, 27 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-iA7AyFIU0>.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholas Cook, “Beyond Music: Mashup, Multimedia Mentality, and Intellectual Property,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



rhythmic restitching of appearances by then British prime minister Gordon Brown.<sup>74</sup> Such audiovisual work can be read as a powerful form of cultural citizenship, where a community can engage in analysis and commentary through the lens of popular culture; and where the same community can find a space in which to discuss and respond to the material, keeping it alive and relevant. Cassetteboy's work has been so successful in part because it offers a near-instant response to current events, bypassing the funded and post-production processes of high-production music.

While Dangermouse and Cassetteboy offer slick viral forms of sonic remediation, fanvid mashups are examples of more user-generated content: the mix of Radiohead "Lotus Flowers" with Beyoncé's "Single Ladies", where Thom Yorke's crazed dancing proves a rhythmically snug fit to Beyoncé's tune is a good example here. In his work on fanvids, Mathias Korsgaard notes that they "often display the potent pairings of image and music sources; in these cases the videos offer a double reading of both the musical and the visual source material, in which one sheds new light on the other".<sup>75</sup> Double readings are particularly apparent in bad lip-syncing videos like "Edward and Bella: A Bad Lip Reading of *Twilight*", the re-cutting of *The Shining* trailer to Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill" (1977) and literal videos, like DustoMcNeato's version of Aha's 1985 classic "Take on Me", all of which use audiovisual montage to critique pre-existing material.<sup>76</sup> Such critique also resides in the versions and parodies that litter YouTube. While many are sincere covers of favourite songs, others use well-known sonic structures to manipulate our view of both original song and new context, like Chris Mann's lockdown parody of Adele's "Hello" (2015), "Hello (From the Inside)" (uploaded 26 March 2020), which quickly garnered over 14 million views from people delighted with the pertinent lyric changes from a song about an unhealed breakup to a perceptive and beautifully sung parody of lockdown anguish (see figure 7 a-e).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Cassetteboy, "Gordon Brown," YouTube video, 01:48, 8 October, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBamli0tIRgcom/watch?v=6QapZl2cLQQ>.

<sup>75</sup> Mathias Korsgaard, "Music Video Transformed," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, 505.

<sup>76</sup> Badlipreading, "'Edward and Bella' – A Bad Lip Reading of *Twilight*," YouTube video, 03:07, September 4 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmxSk0wZxss>; neochosen, "The Shining Recut," YouTube video, 01:23, February 8, 2006, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmkVWuP\\_s00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmkVWuP_s00); DustoMcNeato, "'Take On Me': Literal Video Version," YouTube video, 03:47, October 4, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HE9OQ4FnkQ>.

<sup>77</sup> Chris Mann, "Hello (From the Inside): An Adele Parody By Chris Man," YouTube video, 04:51, March 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5azNpTwV8>.

<INSERT FIGURE 7a-e HERE as a strip of small images>

YouTube's vlogs offer a different form of remediation in which pre-existent music is placed against newly-captured images. Previously, people were able to express themselves and chart their everyday lives online through blogs, but YouTube introduced a temporal, documentary element into this process: "What before was ephemeral, transient, unmappable, and invisible became permanent, mappable, and viewable", writes Manovich.<sup>78</sup> As the zeal to document the mundanity of life took hold, new audiovisual strategies began to manifest. Jenkins has pointed out that early vlogs and video diaries demonstrate an interest in video as a form as much as its ability to produce certain forms of content, and while this is true visually, sonically many vloggers aimed for a familiar, even cinematic audiovisual texture.<sup>79</sup> Synchronous sound prevailed in YouTube's early vlog culture, partly because the specialist skill set required to compose music made it difficult for many users to write their own soundtracks, while YouTube's strict copyright laws prevented the use of pre-existent music. As a result, library music (also known as production music) was often used. This is music, produced by work-for-hire composers, that is owned, licensed and distributed by production music libraries for use in various audiovisual settings. Initially, vloggers could make use of free resources, buy royalty-free packages or pay a small fee to production music libraries, but in 2013, and in response to the overwhelming popularity of vlogs, the platform launched the YouTube Audio Library where users can download copyright-free music and soundeffects to use in their work.<sup>80</sup>

Remediated content, then, in all its possible forms, dominates YouTube's audiovisual landscape. Above, the idea that YouTube operates as a powerful historiographical tool for music's histories and canons was posited. If we now revisit this idea with remix and mashup culture in mind, it becomes clear that YouTube not only offers a crowd-sourced forum for the constructions of music histories, but also destabilises the very idea of a musical canon itself. The prevalence of remediated

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<sup>78</sup> Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life," 38.

<sup>79</sup> See Henry Jenkins, "YouTube and the Vaudeville Aesthetic," (2006), at [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/11/youtube\\_and\\_the\\_vaudeville\\_aes.html](http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/11/youtube_and_the_vaudeville_aes.html).

<sup>80</sup> YouTube Audio Library, <https://studio.youtube.com/channel/UCfDql8zxZmMPFFiuwU1QQJQ/music>.

sonic and audiovisual content on YouTube suggests that the criteria for historically or culturally significant music (or music that is included in a canon), which has traditionally included originality, complexity, innovation and longevity, may need to be rethought to include citation, version and reuse: and the focus on single musicians opened out to make room for collaborative creativity and different skill sets.

### **Undemocratic Democracy**

So far, we've explored how YouTube's amateur interactions have remediated, highlighted and intervened in the contemporary cultural landscape. But whose cultural landscape? These new approaches and opportunities can be seen as a real democratisation of creativity, process, pedagogy and collaboration, either within the DIY communities or more officially via Musicians Wanted or through professional musicians like Jacob Collier. From this perspective, musicians can use the platform to bypass the normal processes of the music industry, to self-promote and to do so with tools that are readily available and easy to use, while music fans can find shared social spaces to voice opinion. This offers a welcome bridge between the grassroots collectivity of folk culture that is local, accessible and of the people and the alienating drives of mass popular culture with its one-way flow of pre-produced material.

These blurred processes, as we have seen, challenged the mechanisms of music historiography and the progression of great works, not only by opening the forum to more diverse musicians, but also by giving voice to a greater range of commentators. Both challenges enabled what Katie Ellis and Gerard Goggin describe as a "social lifelines" to those living with disability", encouraged, notes Patricia G. Lange, young users to develop skills and patterns of communication essential to living in our current networked world, and allowed previously suppressed or oppressed voices to rearticulate their histories and cultural positioning through forms of feminist cyber-activism and the construction, or deconstruction of race-related identities.<sup>81</sup> Considered in this way, YouTube can be seen as a positive space open to multiple viewpoints and positions. And yet, on the other, such digital

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<sup>81</sup> Kate Ellis and Gerard Goggin, quoting D Morrison in "Disability and Social Media," in *The Social Media Handbook*, ed. Jeremy Hunsinger and Theresa Senft (New York: Routledge, 2014), 127; Patricia G. Lange, *Kids on YouTube: Technical Identities and Digital Literacies* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

optimism is tempered by several overarching concerns: what is shown and who has access? Who can speak, and who can listen?

While the platform initiated a cultural move from television and film's one-way flow of information and scheduled programming to a more liberated distribution of content, YouTube's flow of video is not as unmediated as it initially appears. In her work on YouTube's search engines and ranking algorithms, José Van Dijck notes that YouTube helps its 30 million daily visitors to navigate through the seemingly limitless flow of uploads via very specific processes:

The site controls video traffic not by means of programming schedules but by means of an information management system that steers user navigation and selects content to promote. Even though users feel they have control over which content to watch, their choices are heavily directed by referral systems, search function, and ranking mechanisms (e.g. Page Rank). In other words, ranking and popularity principles rule YouTube's platform architecture.<sup>82</sup>

What's being suggested to users holds the power to influence judgement and these "heavily directed" processes bely the digital optimism of YouTube's apparent neutrality. These algorithms not only expose the darker side of online culture's ostensibly democratic processes, including surveillance and data harvesting, they also provide a service that, while useful to many users, nevertheless operates through the promotion of sameness. While YouTube has the potential for cosmopolitan, globalised and localised social groups, Geert Lovink has noted that the unfolding of related videos and suggestions as you watch certain content leads us deeper into similar territory, re-enforcing existing perspectives by creating echo chambers where dialectical or divergent content is not forthcoming.<sup>83</sup> Travelling through these "filter bubbles", users find reinforcement of their political and aesthetic tastes and persuasions rather than challenge or difference.<sup>84</sup> In musical terms this can lead to streams of similar music and artists, which makes it hard for listeners to encounter new sounds and for emerging and experimental artists, or those located outside of the Western soundworlds, to find new listeners. It is these algorithms and

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<sup>82</sup> Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity*, 113.

<sup>83</sup> Geert Lovink, "The Art of Watching Databases: Introduction to the *Video Vortex Reader*," in *Video Vortex Reader*, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel and Justin M. Rao, "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online New Consumption," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2016): 298-320.

echo chambers that contribute to what Alan Bryman refers to as the cultural homogenization and Disneyization of society's media.<sup>85</sup>

This flow of sameness troubles diversity. As Burgess and Green argue:

YouTube proves that in practice the economic and cultural arrangements that "participatory culture" stands for are as disruptive and uncomfortable as they might be potentially liberating... who gets to speak, and who gets the attention, what compensations or rewards there are for creativity and work; and the uncertainties around various forms of expertise and authority... the value and legitimacy of popular culture.<sup>86</sup>

Recent algorithm analysis of YouTube content has shown up a notable lack of ethnic minority voices that make it to the top of suggestion lists, and a 2020 lawsuit alleged that the AI and algorithms used could racially profile content and users.<sup>87</sup> Although ultimately resolved in favour of Google, another law suit argued that the algorithms remove or limit content by black or LGBT creators, and other investigations have found that politically-neutral channels and mainstream media is privileged.<sup>88</sup> Complicating these findings further is the issue of internet user distribution. What those in the West consider to be mainstream use is of course not necessarily mainstream in the rest of the world. When coupled with an uneven access to equipment and adequate power and internet provision, the idea of popular content takes on problematic resonance. In their identification of online culture's "participation gap" that arises through the "[f]undamental inequalities in young people's access to new media technologies and the opportunities for participation they represent", Jenkins et al alights on the disparities of technological privilege.<sup>89</sup> Shzr Ee Tan approaches these inequalities from an intersectional ethnomusicological perspective in her exploration of global digital musiking. Noting the lack of internet uniformity outside the historical global north, she points out that

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<sup>85</sup> Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 19.

<sup>87</sup> Eriq Gardener, "Class Action Complaint for Declaratory Judgement Restitution and Damages," Official report, United States District Court, Northern District of California (filed on June 16 2020), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6950241-Newman.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Reed Albergotti, "Black Creators Sue YouTube, Alleging Discrimination," *The Washington Post*, (June 18 2020), at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/06/18/black-creators-sue-youtube-alleged-race-discrimination/>; Mark Ledwich and Anna Zaitsev, "Algorithmic Extremism: Examining YouTube's Rabbit Hole of Radicalization," *First Monday* 25, no. 3 (2020), at <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/10419>.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Part One)* (Chicago: The MacArthur Foundation, 2007), at [https://www.macfound.org/media/article\\_pdfs/jenkins\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://www.macfound.org/media/article_pdfs/jenkins_white_paper.pdf), 15.

streaming services are either unavailable or used differently around the world.<sup>90</sup> Issues of censorship, privacy and gender vary between different countries and communities and at the time of writing the platform remains blocked in China, removing the voices of a powerful and sizeable community from any research into YouTube music.

### **YouTube Transmedia**

YouTube's promotion of, and impact on, music and musicians, has been both liberating and restrictive. While participation gaps, education, availability and censorship temper any broad statements about the platform's influence on contemporary music cultures, it is nevertheless possible to suggest that it has intermediated between audiences, the music industry and amateur musicians in refreshed ways. YouTube's videos encourage interactive listening, archival spaces, pedagogical opportunities, new music, mashed-up sounds and images, compositional collaborations and canon deconstruction.

But YouTube does not operate in isolation. In fact, in many cases, it operates as a conduit between other platforms. As two chapters later in this book show—Weronika Nowak's work on expanded opera and Thompson's work on Lil Nas X's worldbuilding—YouTube exists within cybermedia's post-media world. Despite their individual specificities, affect and style is shared between TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms, with links, portals and paratexts stitching together different specificities and user expectations.<sup>91</sup> Vernallis positions the platform within what she calls the heightened "media swirl", a vortex in which all forms of screen media influence—or "converse with"—each other.<sup>92</sup> While YouTube was a key early driver of this musical "media swirl", platforms like Twitter, TikTok and Twitch and Web 3.0 metaverse games like *Fortnite*, *Roblox* and *The Palace* have augmented and redefined the possibilities of online participation. And yet, YouTube continues to be a major force for music, in all its forms, within the internet's converging spaces.

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<sup>90</sup> Shzr Ee Tan, "Digital Inequalities and Global Sounds," in *The Cambridge Companion to Music in Digital Culture*, ed. Nicholas Cook, Monique M. Ingalls and David Trippett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 253–73.

<sup>91</sup> Holly Rogers, "The Audiovisual Eerie: Transmediating Thresholds in the Work of David Lynch," in *Transmedia Directors*, 241–270.

<sup>92</sup> Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–29.