

Broadcast Yourself! Internet and playful media practices

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Still, we play. And we play with and through our media.
(Roger Silverstone, 1999:62)

Abstract

In this paper we want to present a work-in-progress research about video self production on the Internet that is part of a broader research project which explores the ways current media practices convey a ‘playful’ relationship with digital technologies in popular culture.

The increasing relevance of video on the Internet as a cultural phenomenon can be traced through a set of related practices around viewing, searching, producing, mixing, sharing and distributing short video productions – generally of low technical quality-through web sites of enormous popularity like YouTube, Revver or Blip TV. These practices allow us to understand media consumption from a transformative point of view that, allegedly, breaks down the division between production and consumption of cultural products redefining the role of the audience. Through these pages we will try to demonstrate that in many of these self productions, play has a crucial role in shaping the relationship between its producers, their audiovisual products and their expected audiences.

In order to empirically explore different kinds of playful appropriations in self producing practices we have chosen to centre our analysis to a limited set of videos uploaded to YouTube, and specifically, we will examine in depth two productions related to a single object of representation, Madrid’s subway, as a comparative case study. Through a detailed study of these videos, their context of production and

* Please do not quote this paper without contacting the authors beforehand.

exhibition, we expect to show that there is a playful element involved in all the processes of production, distribution, consumption, and reception, concluding that the practice of producing videos for the Internet challenges some established theoretical frameworks of cultural production introducing new configurations of audiences.

1. Media practices and cultural production

One of the most important transformations favoured by “new media” technologies lies in the blurring process between traditional spheres of production and consumption. No more can we think of media consumers merely as “viewers”. Even if we refer to active spectatorship, the act of viewing cannot satisfactorily describe what consumers do with new media. As an example, we can cite the video remixing practices attached to any popular video clip in sites like YouTube (new soundtrack, new edits, subtitles, graphic effects or even new image recordings which end up being sometimes even more valued than the original clip). This is why different scholars have tried to describe this “new media subjectivity” in hybrid terms. Thus, Dan Harries defines “viewsing” as “the experiencing of media in a manner that effectively integrates the activities of both viewing and using [...] ‘Viewers’ are the new ‘connected consumers’ who find entertainment pleasure in the multitasking activities being promoted through their computer and television screens” (Harries, 2002: 172). Although this term can be useful to explain emerging forms of media consumption, it still makes direct reference to a traditionally defined concept of reception.

We must take into account that, as Lana Rakow states, although research into media uses has to be considered a giant leap forward in the history of media studies, asking questions related to what people do with media as an act of ‘reading’ cannot take us “beyond a model of communication in which institutions speak while citizens listen” (Rakow, 1999: 66). P. D. Marshall suggests that if we consider that “[r]eception, of whatever media form is a kind of work, a kind of cultural production (...) New media implies a changed spectrum of what defines production and what defines consumption (...) [T]hey are cultural forms that have expanded the capacity for the viewer/user to produce. As the industry grapples with this new paradigm through copyright and intellectual property debates, new media users continue to encroach on appropriating and making their cultural forms their own” (Marshall, 2004:8-11). This is what Marshall defines as the *cultural production thesis*, characterized by a ‘writerly approach’ to the study of new media, that is, more focused on the engagement in practices of cultural production instead of the traditional ‘readerly approach’ (Marshall, 2004: 11). Marshall recognizes that it is difficult to find a single metaphor or neologism which can describe the qualities of these new subjectivities, as they are not precise enough to “identify the spectrum of involvement that is possible with new media”. While ‘browser’ may be considered as an adequate term in order to refer to distracted uses of new media, ‘player’ becomes particularly relevant as it acknowledges an intensity of experience related to a deep engagement and dedicated use of new media (Marshall, 2004: 26-27).

As the empowerment of the user and the production activity come to the fore in new media studies, we want to highlight the notion of ‘player’, and, by extension, the act of play as a key feature of new media, a feature traditionally circumscribed exclusively to childhood and sports. A recent and compelling contribution to the significance of play

in new media studies is Richard Kücklich and Fellow's *Play and playability as key concepts in new media* (2004) which asserts that theories of play allow us to gain insight into the new media landscape. Other authors as Matt Hills have argued that play is also at the core of fans activity of remixing and remaking favourite industrial products and that "it is important to view fans as players in the sense that they become immersed in non-competitive and affective play" and that this playful attitude can explain fans creative engagement and emotional attachment (Hills, 2002:112).

"New media" can be seen as a new model of cultural production that breaks out in multiple ways the linear process of production, circulation and consumption. The creation of new content by the users, widely spread through the Internet, challenges the one-way-oriented relationship between consumers and producers that has so far characterized mass media cultural diffusion. Instead of talking about "reception", consumption of popular culture should be understood in terms of production, but also in terms of the play pleasures involved in such practices with media. This implies a model of media consumption characterized by the playful production, re-elaboration and remixing practices as a way of appropriating digital audiovisual technologies and sharing home-made content through the Internet.

We sustain that we can extend this propositions to some self video productions found on the Internet that are far from traditional home videos or commercial products aesthetics. In order to understand these new media practices we have to attend to people's experience and to examine the whole process of these new kinds of productions and how it is related to mass consumption and popular culture.

Current media audience approaches have rightly questioned traditional theories oriented towards 'media effects' on so-called 'mass audiences'. However, audiences still tend to be considered as a category centred on the activity of interpretation and clearly separated from production. This model falls short when confronted to YouTube media practices, as we shall see later. In this sense, Abercrombie and Longhurst's notion of a 'diffused audience', that is, an audience almost permanently connected to some electronic medium through their everyday life, seems to describe more accurately this new landscape (see Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). At least that is what it seems regarding the ubiquity of new media, the ever-growing increase in media consumption in the context of a performative society -where the processes and rituals of both spectacle and narcissism are extraordinarily relevant-, and as a consequence, the role of media literacy. As far as spectacle is concerned, these authors propose - following Chaney (1993) - that the world appears as "something to be attended to". "The people, objects and events in the world cannot simply be taken for granted but have to be framed, looked at, gazed upon, registered and controlled. In turn, this suggests that the world is constituted as an event, as a performance; the objects, events and people which constitute the world are made to perform for those watching or gazing." (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998:78). This idea also implies the very concept of narcissism which is tied as well to the pervasive process of the gaze. As they say: "The notion of a narcissistic society embodies the idea that people act as if they are being looked at, as if they are at the centre of the attention of a real or imaginary audience." (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998:88)

We consider our approach close to Alaasutari's aim for studying our contemporary media culture as a whole (Alaasutari, 1999). But, more specifically, we situate our

proposal in a space where audience plays the producer role lurking, in its turn, for its own audience. That is to say, we will sustain that through self production, audiences are “playing” to assume the role of producers, designing their own audiences, while some professional producers are also “playing” to imitate amateur self productions for the amusement of their audiences. This back and forth process reshapes the professional contents and formats to get fun in a spiral of cultural production that somehow increases the complexity of the circle of culture proposed by Hall and Du Gay (1997).

This way, in order to give a satisfactory account to this newly spread cultural phenomenon, we have considered to take into account other theoretical frameworks, such as theories of practice (Couldry, Schatzki, Knorr Cetina) and the anthropology of experience (Turner, Csordas, Howes). A subject oriented perspective within a theory of practice framework will allow us to examine how play pleasures introduce innovative changes in the way audiovisual products are consumed and experienced. In this sense, and following Nick Couldry’s proposal, we have understood media practices as an open set of practices relating to or oriented around media, decentring media research from the study of text or its production structures (Couldry, 2003:4). On the one hand, following Couldry, and expanding his positions to our work, we consider video self production as a media practice that implies to move beyond the restricted context of audiovisual consumption and to observe how playful practices are related to media practices and how they are socially organized (Couldry, 2003:8). On the other hand, the anthropology of experience opened by Victor Turner (1986) and followed by Silverstone (1999) allows us to understand media practices as lived experience and to incorporate the senses in the complex cultural patterns that configure human interaction and cultural production.

2. YouTube and self production: defining our case study

Based on this theoretical framework, for our analysis of self video productions and how they are displayed on the Internet, we put forward two main related research questions: a) what are the different kinds of playful appropriations implicit in this kind of video productions and b) what are the strategies developed by the producers to construct their audiences. Our working hypotheses are that play experience is embedded in current media practices, especially those involved in audiovisual production and sharing on the Internet, and that game pleasures define most of the production and reception of this kind of features, consequently producing new configurations of audiences. Through our case study, we will also argue that the audience is co-produced by the audiovisual narrative and Internet related practices, which are the particular use of the possibilities opened by the specific technological device of diffusion.

We are really concerned on how video sharing practices on the Internet exemplify a different model for understanding new media practices including how audiences are configured in this new scenario. So, we wanted to focus our study to self video producing and sharing practices on the Internet. Concretely, we have chosen the most popular website dedicated to video sharing at this moment: YouTube.com, a project created in 2005 by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim and acquired by Google in October of 2006. During its first year, the website grew up in number of users and became an absolute phenomenon of video sharing on the Internet. At the same time,

some particular videos appeared in YouTube have been spread intensely on the Internet and have become the paradigm for the emergent video sharing explosion.

The successful spontaneous video

During this YouTube early stage, some particular videos acquired an enormous popularity and contributed to define the phenomenon itself. This is the case, for example, of “The bus uncle”, a 6 minute videoclip showing a verbal altercation between two passengers on a Hong Kong bus. This case has interested us because it was registered by a third passenger with his mobile phone on April, 2006 and rapidly spread over the web, finally becoming a mass phenomenon in Hong Kong. This video wasn’t conceived (apparently) as a mass media product but, in the end, both television companies and other media as newspapers and radio turned the protagonists into local celebrities. There are other similar examples which depict everyday situations such as “La caída de Edgar” (Edgar’s Fall), recorded in Mexico. In this case, a mobile phone camera recorded a boy struggling to cross a river through a little wooden bridge and finally falling into the water. Once uploaded in the YouTube website a great amount of versions on these videos come into view, probably due to its visual simplicity which makes them easily “spoofed”. There is also a funny component in both videos that permits the construction of the “freak” as a protagonist of these popular videos. In “The Bus uncle” the content is not “funny” by itself, -it simply represents a conflict between a young and an old man for the inappropriate use of the mobile phone in a public space- but it becomes “funny” once on the Internet because of its playful surrealistic re-contextualization.

But what is more interesting about these videos here is that they are an example of “successful” self produced videos. Their “fame effect” is produced by “jumping” from the sphere of Internet to the mass media sphere. That is, the media industry appropriates these videos for its audiences. In the first case, by interviewing the protagonists, constructing narratives around YouTube as a new media of discovering popular stars, and finally, using the situation as a source for an advertisement for the Football World Cup. In the Edgar’s fall, the video was shown at a popular TV program and the local news papers used its triumph to push up YouTube as a paradigmatic example of the “new media” competing with the “old media”. There are two key issues which must be taken into account regarding the ‘fame effect’ of these and other similar videos: on the one hand, they allow YouTube to legitimate itself as a ‘new mass phenomenon’; on the other hand they allow the ‘old media’ (especially the press and television) to construct the audience on YouTube in ‘old media’ terms (for instance, through the weekly publication of rankings of the ‘most viewed’ videos in YouTube, as just another TV station).

Henry Jenkins explains this kind of industrial strategies as an outcome of the tension and the transition that shapes the current media environment (Jenkins, 2004: 34). In describing what he terms as ‘the cultural logic of media convergence’, he states that “[c]onvergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process... Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. They are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture” (Jenkins, 2004: 37). Jenkins’ conclusions lead to the inevitability of a negotiation between producers and consumers in different areas. Marshall, moreover, visualizes this new

scenario as an intricate ‘dance of control and chaos’ where the industries try to contain and service the desires of the ‘audience’ while the audience itself ventures into unserved and uncommercial areas of cultural activity (Marshall, 2002: 74).

The cases previously explained can be considered, in this sense, as two “successful” examples (intended or not by their authors) of self produced videos that finally become integrated in the media industry. The videos become famous, and “jump” from home production and local audiences to mass media audiences. Nevertheless, they can be considered as “exceptions” that don’t allow us to do any further analysis in relation to the video production on the Internet in terms of self production and related media practices and, to some extent, how they might produce new types of audiences. They are good examples of how the “convergence” process may work, but they are also representatives of a new “myth of success” that hides the process of production of the Internet audiences. These narratives of success are somehow used to legitimate the entrance of sites as YouTube in the mass media landscape, but we think that their mediated success does not represent the habitual and massive practices of video self production and consumption on the Internet. How are audiences defined by the producers themselves? Does play have a role in video self production and sharing on the Internet? Can play experience explain some of the practices around video production and sharing? Thus, we would like to overcome these narratives of “success” which are reflected in the ‘most viewed’ ranking structure of these kind of sites, and go slightly further in analyzing self productions with a particular case study that follows the same “playful” components.

Ordinary videos produced by ordinary people in not so ordinary places...

In order to empirically explore different kinds of playful appropriations we considered the possibility of studying video self productions narrowing our field to a single object of representation: Madrid’s subway. The reasons for choosing the underground of Madrid were diverse. First of all, it was a choice of opportunity because we were looking for a culturally familiar place and a criterion of selection that would allow a comparative analysis, avoiding centring our study in factors related to popularity or fame. We also tried to escape from traditional topics of representation or familiar videos, but were self made amateur productions. After exploring YouTube with different topics, we found that the tags “Madrid + metro” came up with a set of videos that fitted well the criteria we were just defining.

Choosing an actual local “scenario”, Madrid’s subway, was interesting to us in order to do a comparative analysis of how play is present in media practices and how such practices with media redefine how a public space is represented and experienced: in most of the cases there was an appropriation of this urban space, understood in terms of transgression and playful attitude by their authors. Although there are substantial differences between the videos selected, there is a particular sense of “performing” not only in narrative terms, but also related to space appropriation that challenged the division between public and private spheres.

In the first search in the YouTube website on the 3rd of April of 2006, there were 62 videos on Madrid’s subway, a very varied sample of images and compositions related to very different gazes and topics on this specific place, going from videos following a documentary style to testimonial videos. At the moment of writing this paper, the

number of productions has increased and there are a total of 914 videos. Among this amount of videos we have selected to present here two case studies that were uploaded between 2006 and 2007 and suggested a very interesting approach to cast our object of study: “Graffiti” and “Acrobats”. “Graffiti” is one of a set of videos that basically represent the action of painting graffiti on a train in the Madrid subway. “Acrobats” is a video that shows a group of friends playing and jumping inside a train cab in the Madrid subway. This last video also forms a “series” with other productions of the same producers and protagonists, but located in other scenarios.

Our fieldwork methodology has been multidisciplinary in focus (anthropology, media studies and literary theory) and we have used a combination of three qualitative techniques for our data construction and comparative analysis:

First, we have proceeded to a formal analysis of the “text”, from an audiovisual and narrative perspective. We have mainly based our content analysis in Algirdas Greimas narrative theories that propose an actantial model, grouped in six terms distributed in couples as follows: the hero/subject of narration, the destinator/addressee (the destinator is the one who communicates the action to do, and the addressee is the one who receives –and benefits from- the action) and the helper/opponent couple (who helps and who obstacles the action). Greimas framework allowed us to focus on the narrative elements producers used to convey their product.

Second, we have contacted and interviewed the users that have uploaded the videos in question. These interviews resulted to be crucial in order to contrast our assumptions derived from the previous formal analysis and to bring out new insights to understand users motivations and production conditions alongside with their strategies for creating their audiences.

And finally, we have taken into account the context of exhibition of the videos and how the users insert them in YouTube, making a selective use of the resources offered by this Internet site. In the context analysis of these videos in YouTube website we observed the following issues: the date of file uploading, the amount of hits produced, the type of links the videos had, and the kind of responses that they originated, both comments and videos linked to the files selected. And, of course, we were especially interested in the authorship of these videos.

3. Madrid Subway by its travellers: Graffiti and Acrobats

Our first case of study, that we have labelled “Graffiti”, consists in a set of seven videos. Five of them are in fact different versions of the same video that has been uploaded from different users, some of them remixing the content, adding music, etc. The other two are originals made by the users that uploaded them. We have considered this set a same unique case study, because there are many coincidences between these videos, but also some nuances that make us question if they constitute a particular genre related with the graffiti’s culture.

To start with, all of these videos have the same plot: a group of people enter the subway platform and, as quickly as possible, some of them paint graffiti on the surface of the train coach while a security agent observes them helpless. The soundtrack is usually a

popular song (*My generation* by The Who; *you can leave your hat on* by Tom Jones, a disco version of *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff, etc.) that starts with the action and ends when the action is finished, so we can conclude that the editing of the action is synchronized with the music. This aesthetic editing reinforces the sense of performance, especially in the first one of the group which is a live version of *My generation* and where the end of the video coincides with the end of the live song and the applause of the public, while the graffiti artists observe their masterpiece once completed.

From an audiovisual perspective, there are some common elements, such as the same kind of shots and angles, the same type of montage (parallel montage, which shows the action of the “writers” and the impotence of the security agents) and of course, the same narration with the same actors: the group of graffiti, the train, the sprays, and the security agents. Although in a very simplistic way, these videos have a narrative structure based in three acts (introduction, development and conclusion) and they introduce intrigue elements, such as the music or shots that anticipate the action of the security man.

Our second case of study, entitled “Acrobats”, is a video that presents a group of friends jumping and doing somersaults in a train in the Madrid subway. The low quality recording is made with a mobile phone camera and at first sight it seems a spontaneous, casual action. The person recording the action is also a member of this group of friends, and in a way, directs the action that is being produced by often shouting: “do it again!” or “come on!”.

The clip constitutes a whole sequence without cuts and with original sound, so there is no montage at all in this video: it seems that the main interest is to capture the action as it is taking place, the pirouettes and movements as they are being performed in front of the astonished passengers. The characters in this video interact between the space and the camera operator and both the acrobats and the camera operator appeal a possible audience by saying: “*if you want to see us in action, YouTube.com* (by the way, a rhyme in Spanish, almost a slogan: “*si nos quieres ver en accion... YouTube.com*”). They also reinforce the idea of making a performance with the sentence: “this is a happening” and the transgressive element is highlighted by the camera saying off the record to a possible audience “look at the face of that man there!”.

In a narrative sense, although the video begins when the action has already started, and seemingly there is no plot, the end is quite well delimited: they arrive at the station where they step off: everybody goes out of the train and the doors close in silence.

Analysing the context of this video in YouTube (following the tags and links displayed) we realised that this video on the Madrid subway belongs to a series of similar “spontaneous” videos made by the same group of people and with a similar intention: to have fun in the street or public spaces by doing “ridiculous” actions trying to provoke dislike reactions from the audience, both in situ and through the Internet, via YouTube *comments and replies*. The main character of these videos is always an anti-heroine girl (Yoli) who is more an object than a subject, because she always becomes a victim of mockery in these performances. The videos are located in the YouTube site in different user’s accounts and labelled with diverse non related tags.

Following our first intuitions and after having analysed all the material from our fieldwork, we can gather some common elements that constitute these two case studies. In the first place, there is an appropriation of the public space and the subway as an object. They both are collective actions linked to the idea of performance or happening and provide a playful and risky approach to what the characters are doing: there is somewhat extreme that excites them (*ilinx* or vertigo in terms of Caillois, 1962:19). There is also a breaking element in the actions: improper behaviour and celebration of it. Finally, the camera is integrated in the action and part of its sense lies on recording it and making it public. In this context, we find a first difference, in the level of integrating the video in the action: while in “Acrobats” the full sense of the action relies on its recording and they have in mind an audience while shooting, in the case of “Graffiti”, the action is autonomous; it could have been happened without being recorded.

4. Narrative, play pleasures and transgression

Comparing narrative structures, we have found that Acrobats mode of representation resembles documentary cinema, “direct cinema” or the “cinema vérité” of Jean Rouch (Rouch, 1975), as far as it pretends to capture “life” as it happens, without narrative elements and practically without edition or special effects. The camera is acting as the provocateur of the action being filmed. The author of Acrobats is a young woman who studies technical architecture together with the rest of her friends appearing. For her, the use of the camera to record the situations they provoke is part of the action itself. In a sense that there is no action without the camera, we are in front of a mediated experience of “playing”, usually at night, which only achieves whole sense when it is recorded and displayed for an “imagined” audience. In her own words: “the camera is an additional element of fun”. This conscience of the audience and the consequences that videos can have after being displayed on the Internet makes them very conscious of their actions; as a result, the video is not as innocent or casual as we thought at the beginning of this research, and the intended audience plays a very important role, as we will later see.

On the contrary, in Graffiti the narrative structure is defined regarding the action captured, but in a sense it becomes fictional. It does not follow a documentary style, but that of a fiction feature. There is a narrative elaboration through the video edition and the music and we can perceive a fictional mythic structure, divided in the classical 3 acts with the classic “hero” (the group of graffiti), the “opponent” (the safety guards) and the helpers (the material aids and the other members of the group that coordinated action). There is a total identification of the camera with the group. As we interviewed the author of one of the graffiti videos, he explained that they do graffiti and the video registration of their “actions” to have fun and to proudly demonstrate what they are able to do to other “writers”. He also says that, through the Internet, their work can be imitated by younger graffiti artists. The video is important for them in a sense that records “their acts”, so its function is mainly testimonial, but also serves to increase their prestige in the graffiti community. The success of the video is measured not only by the quantity of downloads, but by the appropriation of the work by other graffiti fans. As we have discovered, most of the users are not producers themselves, but upload videos to YouTube which they have found in other sites, just because they like them and want to show them in their blogs. One of the interviewed said to us that he just

linked the Graffiti video to his blog because he identified the metro station (it was near his home) and because he is very fond of the hip-hop and graffiti culture.

In relation to the playful elements, we have found in first instance that the producers interviewed told us that they recorded their videos just for fun. There is a playful component in the two performances presented that is evident for the viewer at a first glance. But this impression has been confirmed by the authors themselves, and what is most interesting, in the case of Acrobats, the playful component is present not only in the whole character of the performance, but in the pleasures they expect from uploading their works on the Internet.

In both cases, the play elements are interwoven with the pleasures of the transgression of social norms. Painting graffiti is not just a political act; it is a ludic performance with a strong component of aesthetic and creative pleasure. The creative act becomes a pleasure generator. The video registration in this sense is a way to extend the pleasure of the deed to share it among peers. They don't want to be antagonists or activists. They chase notoriety amongst a group of "experts" that are able to appreciate their artwork. The transgression is not against the established norms and not specifically against the security agents, who in any case, are the obstacle to avoid, an element of the game, but not the final object of their transgression. Thus, there is also a sense of achievement in the act of painting. Following the author words, "it is almost like playing an extreme sport".

The types of responses that Graffiti videos have produced are very radical: they are loved and hated in the same proportion. The "positive" answers belong to people that identify very much with the graffiti movement, and the "negative" answers belong to people offended by the aggression made in a public transport. The intended audience is composed by a circle of friends and fans so they don't care about any other audience far beyond this circle. If there are bad responses to the videos coming from the audience, the author insults them back. He explained us that he is not interested in bad critiques, so he plainly doesn't accept them.

In Acrobats, the transgression is obviously related to behaving like hooligans; the pleasure is not in the creative act nor in the risky action, but in disturbing the normal and expected behaviour on a subway coach, maybe annoying the rest of the passengers. The acrobats are not hooligans, but they play to be hooligans, they pretend to be hooligans. In fact, their acts are just nonsense. Nonsense performed just for the camera. As we have found out through the interview with the producer, part of the play is to upload the video on the Net. The hooliganism is not rooted only in the act of playing and jumping in the subway, but in trying to annoy users that find the video by chance on the Internet. In fact, it is a mediated hooliganism; they try to provoke Youtube's audience with their "unbearable" videos.

So, the most interesting information about this video was provided by the author herself. In our interview, she talked about the strategies they used to reach as much users as possible. For instance, they developed a tagging strategy which consists of including tags like "sex" or "hot", trying to irritate the users who would find the video by chance, because it is not what they had expected. In this case, the conscious construction of the audience is quite clear in the sense that they try to provoke the audience by misleading them to their mockery videos (this tagging strategy was referred as "spamming" by the

author). They also have used tags related with their Architecture School, because they discovered that their jokes “work well” with their colleagues and indeed, they have become “popular” among their college students.

The critiques or bad responses on the video site are considered by them as a success, the proof that their hooliganism has worked out. In fact, almost all the comments on Acrobats are very negative, expressing scorn to the vandal acts in the metro, to the bad manufacturing of the video and also there are some comments of other students of their University that directly blame them as they are “the shame of the School”. When asked about these reactions, she expresses the relation with the audience in terms of “duel with the detractors”. She gets fun by a sort of infuriating the viewers. So, the performance is somehow closed just by the consecution of an “angry” audience, as large and indiscriminate as possible. She says she never answers a comment, as she uses her YouTube account just for fun, not for socializing among her friends, as she considers YouTube as a public space of exhibition, different from other sites such as *Myspace* that she considers more private.

5. Searching for their own audience: media practices, play and sociability

We have analyzed the narrative elements, the combined strategies for creating an audience for their products and the playful components that are present both during the performance and in the exhibition process. Our analysis of video self productions in YouTube, although through a small and delimited case study, has proved that audience construction in this context by the producers themselves is as fascinating as complex. Some of our first ideas on these media practices have been confirmed after our analysis, on the contrary, some assumptions have been refuted. And of course, new questions have been raised. In the following lines we would like to summarize the most relevant conclusions of these first steps in our on-going research.

Applying Greimas’ narrative theories to our analysis, we discovered that some of the elements of the narration, such as the characters (*actants*), appeared at first sight incomplete in the “Acrobats” video. Specially, in “Acrobats” we missed the actant role of the opponent which was quite clear in “Graffiti”. But after an in depth reconsideration, we realised that in “Acrobats” the notion of “opponent” had been displaced to the audience (the “detractors”). This aspect seems to us of crucial importance in a sense that it implies that all the processes related to media production become interrelated in the YouTube system: we realised we did not had to search the narrative elements only in the text, but also in the sharing practices that video self production introduce in the new media context. One of the main conclusions that we have obtained from this case study, thus, is that narration is not only found in the text, but it is also intertwined in the uploading, the tagging strategies and in the implication of the audiences and their reactions as well. In consequence, the product is not only the video, but what’s more, the exhibition practices related to it.

This broader conception of the narrative has been posited by James Paul Gee related to video games theory. He considers that many video games generate story elements through the player action, even if they are not explicit narrative games (Gee, 2006:59). He opines that the story elements can be found in the rule system about shapes, movements and combinations between actors, objects, actions, states, and events (Gee,

2006:59). This point of view of considering narrative in an extended sense is very interesting in terms of analysing how narrative, visual and ludic elements work in a video game, but it can also be useful to understand new media practices, such as self video productions on the Internet. Narrative, this way, can be understood as the linking elements that allow integrating the different aspects that are part of a videogame, but in our case, also the different practices related to video self production.

The second conclusion, related to the previous one, is that the relationship between these videos and the audience is produced in terms of prestige and opposition: “Graffiti” wish to be appreciated by their circle of friends; the intended audience is the group of graffiti members, and the people who is like them, while “Acrobats” want to provoke their audience. But both wish to become popular with these videos amongst their immediate circle of sociality. They both use tags as a way to attract their audiences, but Graffiti strategy for constructing their audiences mainly consists on “dropping” their colleagues to their videos trough embedding them in their blogs, while Acrobats use two types of strategies to create two types of audiences: As the producer suggests, they want to reach an indiscriminate and wide audience by tagging their videos with sexy labels or famous television programs, and at the same time they want to reach a proximity audience by using the acronym of their School as a tag. By using playful strategies such as “wrong tags” they try to reach their expected “detractor” audiences. This point is relevant in order to understand how the Internet audiences are articulated through sites as YouTube by the different strategies displayed by the producers or users themselves, and the important role that users give to tags for that purpose. They are presupposing a “browsing audience”, that will arrive to the site by chance, and a “proximity audience” that possibly will only reach the site by direct addressing.

What is important to note here is that audiences on the Internet are defined and co-constructed between the users and the technological context of exhibition. A configuration of the audiences drawn as concentric circles could be expected, where the proximity audience would be in the centre and a more general or mass audience in the outer circles. Yet, in the cases studied, whilst there are some proximity audiences, these are not always the first goal neither the first step when the authors approach the task of constructing and playing with their audiences. On the contrary, we have observed that both targets (proximity and general audience) and their correlated strategies are concurrent, thus providing a much more complex picture.

The audience construction is in part a result of the strategies followed by the producers themselves, and in part a result of the responses of their audiences in terms of appropriation (linking, uploading or embedding the videos). The audience information given on the videos site related to number of hits, comments, favourite, ranking and links can also act as defining elements of the kind of audience actually reached, but as we have seen, producers can play with these elements too, as in the case of Acrobats, where a “bad response” was a “good response” from the perspective of the video producers.

The playful attitude evident in these case studies at first sight finally becomes supported by other playful practices and strategies that are part of the processes of new media production and reception. “Acrobats” results to be a very complex play that involves the audience so to complete its narrative circle, while Graffiti enhances the emotion of playing with the risk trough an elaborated editing. But in both cases, the socialization of

the images through the Internet expands the playful experience to a defined audience. They are not “famous” videos and they do not have a large number of hits (around 5.000) but they have generated their own audiences, and what is most important for them, they have had fun in the whole process of producing and sharing their images.

In these pages, we have tried to explore play, as Roger Silverstone pointed out, as a tool for the analysis of media experience while vindicating its role as a core activity of daily life (Silverstone, 1999:59-60). As he said: “There are many ways in which we can see the media as being sites for play, both in their text and in the responses that those texts engender” (1999:60). We have wanted here to explore his proposition a little bit further, finding that media play is a practice related not only to computer games or quiz show programs, but also to the production and sharing of media outlets. His questions regarding the assessment and consequences of these experiences within cultures remain open. Anyway, we have seen how playing with media allows audiences to ‘play to be producers’, experiencing this way public spaces -like Madrid’s subway- as spaces of performance and appropriation, strengthening the pleasures of transgression and the celebration of self empowerment. However, we must take into account that all this practices take place in a perfectly defined media environment, ruled by economic –in 2.0 fashion- purposes. It would be then a mistake to take YouTube as a utopian place for free expression, as much as to consider it under ‘mass-media’ rules or as a monument to inanity, narcissism or nonsense (as it is suggested by Andrew Keen). We see sites like YouTube as an opportunity to ‘catch’ the diffused audiences, in order to re-think the limits between production and consumption, and to understand the new ways audiences are being constructed.

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