

YouTube Poop

A Picture of the Digital



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Abstract: This paper discusses the web video genre YouTube Poop. After describing it extensively, based on thirty user channels, YouTube Poop is discussed in the light of possible aesthetic predecessors and literature regarding the fundamentals of the web. The aesthetics and style conventions of YTP are shaped by both Postmodern culture and the digital. Finally, early and contemporary Poops are distinctive in meaning and intention.

Key words: YouTube, YouTube Poop, YTP, Triple-M-Theory, détournement, Dadaism, Postmodernism, culture jamming, cultural lineage, aesthetics, cyberspace, Kelty, Lovink, Dery, Bordwell & Thompson.

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Introduction

Because YouTube is where the Poop is.

- YouTube Poop slogan and intro

YouTube is the most popular video website in a large array of countries. It has inspired many people to upload videos about their interests and themselves. YouTube provides a platform on which communities can flourish. Groups of people are formed around specific interests, such as a musician, a hobby or a dog breed. Sometimes a group is formed around a somewhat less conventional interest. This is the case with YouTube Poop. I call it a web video genre, a community, a web culture. It revolves around subverting certain video material, provoking YouTube and challenging the video editing software.

YouTube Poop (or YTP) is a web video genre which concentrates on the remixing, looping, adapting and audio mixing of existing material, preferably children's programs, home shopping shows and in some cases music videos. The goal is to form the existing content into something different, something banal, something funny. Examples of Poops are 'LUIGI SAYS SPAGHETTI FOR TEN MINUTES IN HORRENDOUS QUALITY'¹, 'Youtube Poop: Gaston and Frolo Get a Life'² and 'THIS VIDEO WILL BE FLAGGED BY FEMINISTS'³.

The subject for my bachelor thesis is perhaps as unconventional as this web genre itself. YouTube Poop is a strange phenomenon. However, it is a very valuable object of study. It shows how people engage with a medium, a website, for the expression of their own interests and for critique on the platform as well. YouTube Poop makes an odd appearance on YouTube. With its provocative titles and random subjects, it really stands out in the context of more conventional interest-oriented videos. It is a self constituted web video genre with every characteristic of bottom-up power. No official instance ever called for its existence, to the contrary; today it's more likely to call for its annihilation.⁴ On the other hand, the owners of YouTube might want to support the flourishing of user created communities and genres, even if they critique the website.

In my opinion, the best way to really get to know the genre is to browse around and snowball through the videos which include either 'YouTube Poop' or 'YTP' in the title. It is true that not every video displays these words in the title. However, YouTube Poop videos can be categorized as such due to specific style conventions. It is these conventions I explore in this paper. The general questions I ask in this paper are: What is

¹ 'LUIGI SAYS SPAGHETTI FOR TEN MINUTES IN HORRENDOUS QUALITY' created by lulzcorrupt, 11 January 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXykpda5Z4s>>

² 'Youtube Poop: Gaston and Frolo Get a Life' created by DinnerWarrior, 5 July 2010 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eI-shoahYOU>>

³ 'THIS VIDEO WILL BE FLAGGED BY FEMINISTS' created by FoolishInnocent, 16 September 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHNS6fikvKM>>

⁴ Media content companies are continuously trying to get videos including their content banned.

YouTube Poop? What are the conventions of YouTube Poop? Which (past) cultural expressions can be seen as possible predecessors or portray similarities? How can we understand YouTube Poop in light of the past and the present?

First, an introduction of the platform YouTube, without which YouTube Poop could not have existed, is provided, followed by a thorough description of the phenomenon that is YouTube Poop. The introduction for YouTube instantly serves as theoretical framework, for the subject YouTube Poop is has not been greatly discussed by scholars. Sources regarding YouTube Poop that were plentiful, however, are definitions on YTP given by websites, which were mostly accurate and, moreover, give good insight into public opinions and receptions of YTP. After this, the style conventions of YouTube Poop are discussed. For this, I examined a corpus of thirty channels, including the top five most popular YouTube Poop video creator (Pooper), users who created 'early Poop' videos. 'contemporary Poops', backup channels and Poopers followed for a longer period of time, on average about a year. After reading the first chapter, it is clear what a real YTP video consists of and what an "average Pooper" might be like. In chapter two, the three main characteristics of YouTube Poop are described. Taking this theory as base, a lineage for YouTube Poop is sought, comparing it to cultural expressions from the past that resemble it. In chapter three, more literature will be discussed, regarding cyberspace and the natively digital. The (characteristics of the) web and the video editing software play non-excludable roles in the existence of YouTube Poop. I will state that the roots of YouTube Poop have a cultural side and a new media or natively digital side.

The goal for this thesis is to form an understanding of YouTube Poop, a cultural phenomenon ridiculing culture, from a New Media research perspective.

1. A closer look at YouTube Poop

1.1 YouTube: a creative platform

YouTube is a video website founded in February 2005. Since then, it has developed itself as the most popular web video channel in the world. Now in 2011, 24 hours of video material is uploaded every single minute of each day and the daily view count exceeds 2 billion.⁵ YouTube has spread all around the globe and continues to grow.

YouTube is one of the most influential websites on the web today. Needless to say, discussing it would be fruitful indeed. Consensus exists on the fact that YouTube is a prime example of participatory culture (term established by Jenkins et al.: 2006c, p. 7, Burgess 2008, Schäfer 2011). Users can participate with the website, for example by sharing their interests in a homemade video or by commenting on videos posted by other users.

The basic principles of YouTube are simple. Everybody with a computer with access to the internet can be a YouTube user. Users can create an account or surf the site anonymously. Creating an account has benefits, such as the ability to upload a video, create a list of favorites and comment below videos. Standard videos can't be longer than fifteen minutes.⁶



Figure 2. YouTube interface

As can be seen in figure two, the most prominent part of the webpage interface of YouTube is the video. Underneath the video is a description box and comments by users.

⁵ 'YouTube Facts & Figures (history & statistics)'. *Website Monitoring Blog*. Posted 17 May 2010 in infographics. 8 May 2011 < <http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/>>

⁶ Note that before July 2010 the limit was ten minutes. This is important to keep in mind, as old videos will be discussed in this paper. In a remark, Product Manager Joshua Siegel of YouTube referred to Andy Warhol, expressing his wish to grant "fifteen minutes of fame" to every user. Source: Siegel, Joshua. 'Upload limit increases to 15 minutes for all users'. *Broadcasting Ourselves*;). *The Official YouTube Blog*. Uploaded 29 July 2010. 8 May 2011 < <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2010/07/upload-limit-increases-to-15-minutes.html>>

On the side there are video suggestions on what to watch next. These are the basics. Furthermore, the user can send in a video reply, rate the video, favorite it, “flag” it (marking it as inappropriate), create a playlist, see its statistics and subscribe to channels.

This participation capability for users can be received in two ways. On one hand, it can be seen as user empowerment: the user is breaking free of dominance by the large old media companies (Lovink 2009, Jenkins 2006a, 2006b). On the other hand, extensive user participation might be seen as resulting in the downgrade of culture. Mass culture will reign over high culture and banality over good taste (Adorno & Horkheimer 1944, Keen 2007).⁷ It can also lead to *interpassivity*, an interactivity which seems to offer liberation from user passivity, but actually only makes the object (here YouTube) active while leaving the subject (user) passive (Zizek 1998), giving only limited options and forcing the user to act within the boundaries offered by the medium. It is possible to support both points of view regarding YouTube.

YouTube is and remains a commercial website making profit, doing so by providing advertising space. It relevant to keep in mind that YouTube is commercial and makes money off the creativity and/or free labor of its users.⁸ While not saying it is necessarily a bad thing - and emphasizing the fact that creativity is stimulated by this website and talented people have been discovered on it - this can be a possible source of critique. Remarking this is important in understanding the motivation for creating YouTube Poop videos.

1.2 Defining YouTube Poop

All the videos on YouTube united under the umbrella term YouTube Poop have things in common, and are different from each other at some points. My goal here is to describe what exactly YouTube Poop is and what it is not. YouTube Poop can briefly be described as an evolving and relatively diverse YouTube genre in which the creators of the videos take existing material, preferably content in which spoken text is well articulated and the visuals and actions are clear and simple, and this material is remixed, adapted, shook up, looped and edited until a video with humorous intentions appears with little to no relation to the intentions of the original product and context.

To define YouTube Poop as a genre, we must first examine what a genre is. The Merriam Webster Dictionary online defines it as a ‘kind, category, or sort, esp of literary or artistic work’ (Collins English Dictionary, 2009). The Cambridge Dictionary Online defines a genre as ‘a style, especially in the arts, that involves a particular set of

⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944 discussed mass culture (the *Culture Industry*) in general, especially mechanically reproduced culture, Andrew Keen discussed the internet in particular.

⁸ For more on this subject, see Tiziana Terranova, *Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2000.

characteristics' (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 1995). YouTube Poop is indeed a web video category and a style with a particular set of characteristics, and thus a genre.

YouTube Poop is a phenomenon on which not much has been written yet. The only scholarly remark I found on the topic was by Geert Lovink in his article 'Flagging or Fagging' in a Video Vortex Reader.⁹ This is the entire text on YouTube Poop there has been written so far:

An interesting, however non-related, trend has sprung up amongst the YouTube community to make videos by the name 'This Video Will Be Flagged.' The trend goes under the name 'YouTube poop', these clips consist of repeated sequences of mostly cartoons, from which the editor has taken a few frames and repeated it. Resulting in videos where words like 'fuck' and 'sex' are endlessly repeated. In the text column they challenge the 'flaggers' to flag the video, often referring to them as 'flaggots' or 'fl@ggots' (Lovink 2008, p. 159).

I would like to add to this early definition that things have changed since the year 2008. Back then this definition perhaps would have sufficed for one branch of the total genre of YouTube Poop, but now there are a lot more videos that may count themselves to the realm of the Poops. This should become clear in the following paragraphs.

Another source always on top of defining "street phenomena" is the Urban Dictionary, a website on which users can provide definitions of popular occurrences. The highest rated definition here is currently:

YouTube Poop is a name used for videos posted on YouTube which are usually nonsensical and random. They are simply just randomly chosen clips from things such as cartoons, clipped, looped and remixed to make it sound really strange. The most commonly used clips include scenes from the CD-i game of The Legend of Zelda, and a Mario game called Hotel Mario. These particular YouTube Poop videos (or YTP) are popular among the internet-savvy people and are a major source of internet culture. (Urban Dictionary, 'youtube poop' April 2011)

The second highest rated definition is also a very adequate description on the genre itself and on how people react to the videos according to the writer. Take special note on the second section.

A YouTube Poop, or YTP, is a mix of media (most commonly video) to generate a video that either stuns, annoys, or entertains its audience. Contrary to

⁹ This is the companion book to the conference Video Vortex, in this case the fourth session. See Lovink 2008.

popular belief, YTP is not limited to Zelda and Mario cartoons, Over 9000, or Sonic cartoons, but it can be a mix of anything; material is unlimited.

The definition of YouTube Poop and the style is always being altered, and viewers of it have different reactions. To some, YTP is an art, and to others, it is worthless and pointless, with no reason to exist.

The first YouTube Poop, "I'D SAY HE'S HOT ON OUR TAIL" by SuperYoshi, was created in 2004, using Super Mario Bros. 3, and since then, YTP has evolved into a community of more than 200 poopers. (Urban Dictionary 'YouTube Poop', April 2011)

Some people think YTP is an art, some think it's worthless. This defines that YouTube Poop is a (web) community: there is a certain group that can appreciate the value of Poops, and there are the 'outsiders' who don't understand it. Or in other words, there are people that are *in* the web community and people that are *out*.

It is not common for a YouTube Pooper to define his expertise. However, one Pooper, 'chemistryguy', did explain it on his channel. Then again, he doesn't define himself as a 'standard' Pooper, being forty years of age and noticing that other Poopers are still in high school.

WHAT THE HELL IS YOUTUBE POOP?

For the uninitiated, YouTube Poop is taking existing videos, doing whatever the hell editing you want, and calling them your own. Viacom is none too happy with this definition.

Think of the food going into your body and the resultant substance exiting. It doesn't resemble the former very much, does it? Nor do YouTube Poops much resemble their parent videos.

I'm never sure which style I'm going to work with next. Typically I employ a good deal of masking and exploit the hidden humor of my sources. I imagine watching my videos is similar to taking a mind-bending drug before watching t.v.

I do, in fact, highly recommend watching my poops as an alternative to drug use. (YouTube channel description of user chemistryguy, 11 May 2011)¹⁰

Furthermore, he also explains *why* he does it. He names three main reasons: making himself laugh, making others laugh and, as he ventilates, 'I love attention. The thought of public speaking makes me want to vomit, but the beautiful anonymity of YouTube and the ability of express myself creatively and without reserve is Rawesome!' (ibidem).

So, making people laugh is very important to Poopers. This desire I found on many channel I searched, which is thirty channels.¹¹

¹⁰ User channel description of chemistryguy.11 May 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/user/chemistryguy>>

On the channels of Poopers I also found lists of influences. Some users reappear in the list, such as user 'cjflo' and 'waxonater'. The lists suggest that Poopers want to give some credit to other Poopers, and this argument is supported by all the intensive interaction between Poopers. Poopers are subscribed to many other Poopers. They chat on their channels, they favorite each other's videos, and they are compassionate when pieces are taken down due to copyright infringement.¹² There is even a dedicated forum-like website for discussions and featured videos, YouChewPoop.net. The community of YouTube Poopers is close, respecting, compassionate and united by the common interest of making people laugh about remixed video material.

For one last definition, the "wiki" website TvTropes.org can add some important information about YouTube Poop. For a start, the website entry on YouTube Poop reads that the genre started with SuperYoshi (as seen in the Urban Dictionary definition), who was supposedly 'testing out Windows Movie Maker, a new piece of software he found in his newly installed Windows XP' ('YouTube Poop'. Tv Tropes. 11 May 2011). Implied here is that YouTube Poop "sort of came out of nowhere", by experiment, maybe even by accident. I do believe this to be true. Further in the text, this sentence appears.

With the growing popularity YouTube Poop shifted from being videos that confuse people who were looking for regular videos (in fact, the people who started it are more fond of "WTF?" comments than people commenting or repeating the parts they liked in the video and were dismissive of the term "Youtube Poop" for a long time) to videos that entertain people by using video sources that have become iconic with the name Youtube Poop ('YouTube Poop'. Tv Tropes. 11 May 2011)

This explains the motivation of early users and the purpose of contemporary uploaded videos. In the early days, Poopers wanted to shock, confuse or stun the viewer by misleading them or posting a video with a provocative (often caps locked) title.¹³ They enjoyed confusing unsuspecting YouTube users. The 'What The F***?' comments were a source of laughter for people who understood the joke. Later however, supposedly since the term 'YouTube Poop' was being used, it became a genre with iconic sounds and images, jokes and conventions.¹⁴ As promised in the introduction, these conventions I will discuss thoroughly.

¹¹ See the list in the next paragraph and in the bibliography. Found on the channel of DinnerWarrior, cs188, chemistryguy, KeeperOfPorridge.

¹² Coinciding with this, Poopers will sometimes migrate to other platforms such as Dailymotion, a competing video website. For instance, KeeperOfPorridge has a(nother) backup channel on Dailymotion.com <<http://www.dailymotion.com/KeeperOfPorridge#videoId=xii5xy>>

¹³ Poopers were not alone in this. Think of the phenomenon 'Rick Rolling', which according to YouTube started in May 2007. ('YouTube Facts & Figures (history & statistics)'. *Website Monitoring Blog*. Posted 17 May 2010 in infographics. 8 May 2011 <<http://www.website-monitoring.com/blog/2010/05/17/youtube-facts-and-figures-history-statistics/>>)

¹⁴ There are even websites where special YTP Soundboards can be downloaded, including all of the most iconic sounds and jokes.

The distinction made here in *early* and *contemporary* YouTube Poops is an important one. Both have their own motivations, effects and conventions. Roughly, the difference between the two is that the early Poops were more about provoking the medium and its users, the contemporary are more about ridiculing the used material and challenging the montage software. The contemporary Poops thrive on iconic jokes and their own notorious status. I will come back on this thoroughly in chapter two and three.

1.3 *Documentation of an Internet Sensation*

Reconstructing a cultural phenomenon after its moment has passed is never as accurate as when the moment is captured and described. With YouTube Poop, one might argue that the phenomenon is documenting itself on the internet in databases. This is only partially true. YouTube, just like any other website, is a dynamic and constantly changing platform, a characteristic in unity with the very nature of the web (Schneider and Foot 2004, p. 2). Channel descriptions are constantly filled out differently, and what has been erased is no longer available to the normal user. Videos are being deleted on order of content companies. Even entire channels are closed down never to return. Therefore, it is indeed necessary to have a contemporary understanding of the homemade web video genre YouTube Poop.

In the previous paragraphs, we have seen that YouTube is a creative platform that offers a wide spectrum of possibilities, but also makes money off the ideas of its users. YouTube Poop definitions have shown that in early Poops 'flagging' was sometimes desired and confusing and misleading the viewer was a main purpose. Some people understand the humor and are a part of the community, some people think YTP is irritating and useless and therefore do not take part in the community. There is consensus about the first Poop, which was created in 2004 by SuperYoshi, who was supposedly trying out Windows Movie Maker on his newly installed computer. Finally, there are two types of Poops: early and contemporary. Early Poops were all about confusing viewers; contemporary Poops are more iconic, united under the term YouTube Poop and using iconic jokes which Poopers inside the community will understand.

Beside the definitions people have dedicated to YouTube Poop, one can naturally derive much information from the uploaded videos and their description boxes, comments, and channel descriptions. My corpus exists of thirty YouTube channels of Poopers. It is composed of the following Anglophone Poopers: the top five most viewed videos on both search entries 'YouTube Poop'¹⁵ and 'YTP'¹⁶, five 'early' Poopers¹⁷, five contemporary

¹⁵ Top five for 'YouTube Poop' in right order: CaptainOhYeah, Hurricoaster, Saige385, FlameStormStudios and JeffLindblom.

¹⁶ Top five for 'YTP' in right order: mark3611, DurhamrockerZ, prblizard, DaRevengeOfHentaiBoi and Antifrost.

Poopers¹⁸, three backup channels¹⁹, three Poopers of which I have followed the activities over a longer period²⁰ and four Poopers encountered along the way.²¹

YouTube Poop is popular, as can be seen by following statistics, and the amount of videos and view counts are only increasing. According to a definition on the Urban Dictionary the community of Poopers exists of two hundred uploading members, and this number is probably either dated or modest. Typing in 'YouTube Poop' in the search bar of YouTube gives approximately 29.000 results, which are not all relevant, 'YTP' gives 14.000 results which are mostly relevant. Searching 'This video will be flagged' gives 15.900 results. The most viewed YouTube Poop video is currently 'YouTube Poop: Pride Patties' by user CaptainOhYeah, with 4.757.887 views.²² The next most viewed video has a count of over three million, two videos have more than two million views and eight videos have between one and two million views.²³

1.3.1 Stylistic conventions

To get a clear insight in the conventions of YouTube Poop, I will sum up YouTube Poop video characteristics. The contents of the following table were drawn from two years of acquaintance with YouTube Poop and from the corpus of thirty channels. There are four categories of conventions: humoristic conventions, ridiculing, subverting and Pooper trademark conventions. I will briefly explain them and exemplify them with videos. All together, these characteristics make up a great deal of the stylistic conventions of YouTube Poop.

Not every video utilizes every characteristic – far from it. But they are all characteristics that I have seen repeatedly in YTP videos. The stylistic conventions of YouTube Poop include, but are not limited to:

¹⁷ Five 'early' Poopers with videos before 2008: electricthecheese, Pikawil64, TheRealDonEast, MarkieV101 and Zerobadniks.

¹⁸ Five contemporary Poopers who post regularly: Dikekike, LinkOnDrugs, ImperialLobster, AlvinYTP and KatanaSoul.

¹⁹ Three backup channels: KeeperOfBeans (for KeeperOfPorridge), cs188returns (of cs188) and kehmistreegi (of chemistryguy).

²⁰ Followed for a longer period: KeeperOfPorridge, cs188 and DinnerWarrior.

²¹ Encountered Poopers: FoolishInnocent, Valhawyn, SomePkmnlovingdude and chemistryguy.

²² Note here that I can only search on videos with 'YouTube Poop' and 'YTP' in the title. Consequently, YTP videos who comply with the style conventions without these words in the title are not counted here.

²³ It would be interesting to see here if in distribution of popularity of videos we are dealing with a long tail model, as described by Chris Anderson in Wired Magazine, October 2004.

Conventions for YouTube Poop	Humor	Ridiculing	Subverting	Pooper trademark
Goal	Making people laugh	Poking fun at the material/medium /software	Changing/distorting the original message	Developing own style and contributing to stylistics/community
Convention	<i>Vulgar jokes</i>	<i>Peculiar title</i>	<i>Sentence mixing</i>	<i>Intro</i>
Explanation	Including sex jokes, toilet humor, violence, implying mental instability of characters	Rude, caps locked, suggestive, misleading or revealing/descriptive	Audio mixing, making characters say altered words and sentences	Customized intro, may include YTP logo
Example	'Youtube Poop: Gaston Pleasures Himself to the Sound of His Own Voice' (cs188, January 2011)		'Viking - Michael Rosen YTP' (ImperialLobster, August 2009)	'You tube poop intro' (samanthablue9, August 2008)
Convention	<i>Memes</i>	<i>Material: well articulated and clear actions</i>	<i>Musical Compositions</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>
Explanation	Iconic jokes. Generic YTP (re)appearances and general web memes	Well articulated material includes children's programs and home shopping. Actions and scenes are preferably easy to follow	Repeating sounds can result in a musical piece, Poopers acquired this trick	Poopers rarely share information about themselves, unlike some other YouTubers
Example	'Youtube Poop - Aladdin commits suicide' (AlvinYTP, August 2010)		'YTPMV: Big Beat Mario' (SkyGuy16, December 2009)	
Convention	<i>Repetition</i>	<i>Effects</i>	<i>Glitchy and random</i>	<i>Back-up account</i>
Explanation	Early Poops would often exist of endless repetition of one word or action, annoying YouTube and its users for fun	Whereas professional video editors don't use many effects provided by the software, Poopers do so extensively.	Rapid montage, jump cuts, sped up and slowed down sounds and images, fast source switching, juxtaposition, extreme use of effects	Creating a back-up account for uploading copyrighted material which might lead to trouble or just to be safe is practiced regularly
Example	'YouTube Poop: Squadala For 2 Minutes' (12815991, 2007)	'Fort Jack' (CommanderGwonam, Februari 2011)	'Pingun ADHD' (jubduk, October 2010)	'cs188' created 'cs188returns', 'KeeperOfPorridge' created 'KeeperOfBeans', 'chemistryguy' created 'kehrmistreegi'
Convention	<i>Short flashing text</i>	<i>Playing with the medium</i>	<i>Decontextualize</i>	<i>Introducing new material</i>
Explanation	By inserting a very short displayed text, Poopers challenge their viewers to pause at the right instant to be able to read the joke	This is a broad convention, including: filling in channel description rebelliously, short flashing text and turning up volume very loud ('ear rape')	Subverting the message also means placing it in a different context, such as a new storyline or no storyline at all	Every Pooper can introduce new existing material to use, which other Poopers will pick up on if it's suitable
Example	'Thomis, Terence & The Baking Powder' (KeeperOfBeans, March 2011) short text at 1:19	'MARIO TEACHES EAR RAPE' (valcion, November 2007)	'Youtube Poop: The Disfunctional Banks Family' (KeeperOfPorridge, August 2010)	

The materials used, the memes imported, the style of jokes, the utilization of effects, the effort and time put into the videos and the ways of making fun of the medium are constantly changing and developing. Therefore, this list is far from permanent. This isn't surprising, considering that the web itself is balancing between the permanent and the flowing (Schneider and Foot, 2004).

The table provides an insight in how Poops are constituted today, and what might be expected when watching one. Humor is achieved by many means, as is ridiculing and subverting the message. Poopers themselves add to the stylistics and the community by adding new materials to use, new logo's and intro's, new styles and trademarks. Two good examples of Pooper trademarks are by KeeperOfPorridge and cs188. KeeperOfPorridge repeatedly used the 'Thomas 'O' Face': a shocked facial expression of Thomas the Train, accompanied with the sound of a high pitched train honk.²⁴ He would use this in almost every Thomas the Train video and it has expanded to Poops with different (main) sources. The other trademark by cs188 is a series of Poops called 'Pooping the charts', in which he uses a couple of contemporary pop music songs as material.²⁵



Figure 3. Thomas 'O' Face by KeeperOfBeans Figure 4. 'Pooping the Charts' by cs188

Playing with the medium is a very important YouTube Poop characteristic. The short flashing text, filling in their channel description, the 'pause' button, the YouTube logo and company name, even the content companies, they are all challenged. In chapter two, this will be put in perspective.

²⁴ 'Thomis, Terence & The Baking Powder' re-uploaded by KeeperOfBeans, backup channel for KeeperOfPorridge, 31 March 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQXTIIzVqK8>> Thomas 'O' Face at 1:17. Short flashing text at 1:19.

²⁵ For instance: '[YTP] Pooping the Charts Vol. 4 - Rebecca Black and Justin Bieber Take A Dump Together' created by cs188, 18 March 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBjdlkwrBo>>

1.3.2 A Portrait of Poopers

Sketching a portrait of YouTube Poopers is not an easy task. As seen in the table above, Poopers like to stay anonymous. However, a fair share of them have named in their channels interests like games, old school gaming, anime, cartoons, "pretty girls", internet and YouTube Poops. They have referred to websites like DeviantArt.com, VeryDemotivationalPosters.com and fanstuff.hrwiki.org; and gaming (platforms) including *Steam*, *Xbox Live* and *Team Fortress* (Quake 1996-). Poopers are interested in internet memes and viral videos, iconic messages and "online underground culture".²⁶

Furthermore, Poopers have their own forum called YouChew.net, where they can share thoughts, post video (links) and get to know each other. Users on the forum use their YouTube account name, which makes them easy to find and also reveals it to be an extended platform, not an independent one.

User chemistryguy expressed he thinks most Poopers are in high school. I agree with this, and I have observed that the "average Pooper" is a male between fourteen and mid twenties, living in the United States or the United Kingdom.²⁷ He owns a computer and knows his way around the web. He knows how to download software and content/material illegally and enjoys fiddling with video editing programs. He is a wizkid, a twenty first century adolescent with the desire to make people, including himself, laugh. He spends enough time on the "interwebz" to know what is a *hot item* at the moment and can merge himself into debates around these subjects seamlessly.

In short: Poopers enjoy "Geek culture" and form a "Geek community". This explains their choice in materials (Mario, Zelda, cartoons) and style of their jokes. Poopers are internet savvy geeks. They are the cool (though regularly misunderstood) kids of YouTube who can express creativity and are thus far socially skilled in order to form a community. More on this in chapter three.

²⁶ For the corpus on which this information is based, see page 11. Interests and websites named by, among others, KeeperOfPorridge, DinnerWarrior, SomePkmlovingdude, chemistryguy, cs188, ImperialLobster, TheRealDonEast, MarkieV101. Also, on the YouChew.net forum, these interests are highlighted.

²⁷ Channel description information from the thirty channels (27 Poopers + 3 back-up channels):

Age:	Country:
16: I	United States: IIIII III
19: III	United Kingdom: IIIII I
18: I	Other: II
21: II	
22: II	
25: I	Age between 16 and 20: five Poopers
26: II	Age between 21 and 26: seven Poopers

Other than the following results, the Poopers would not reveal much about themselves (besides their interests, mentioned above). Results:

Saige385 is 19 and from the United States. Hurricoaster is 16. FlameStormStudios is 25 from the United Kingdom. JeffLindblom is 21 from United Kingdom. DurhamrockerZ is 21 and from the United States. DaRevengeOfHentaiBoi is from the Philippines. Antifrost is 18 (member since 2007, meaning he was around 14 at the time). Pikawil64 lives in Canada. TheRealDonEast is 22 and from the US. MarkieV101 lives in the US. Dikekike says he is 110 and lives in Horse. LinkOnDrugs is 22 and from the US. ImperialLobster is from the United Kingdom. AlvinYTP is 26 from the UK. KatanaSoul is 19 from the UK. KeeperOfPorridge is from the UK. FoolishInnocent is from the US. Valhawyn is 19 from the US. SomePkmnlovingdude is 26 from the US.

2. YouTube Poop essentials

In this chapter I will look at the essentials and possible origins of YouTube Poop. What similar cultural expressions came before YTP? (How) can we see a resonance of these predecessors in YTP? How can this be explained? At the base of this exploration stand three main traits of YouTube Poop, which are *medium provocation*, *content subversion* and *radical montage*. Poops always possess all three, but a video can lean towards one or two traits in particular. As seen in chapter one, making people laugh is often the main goal. These three traits, then, are to large extent serving this goal.

I will describe these three traits, and then connect them to possible influences and predecessors. Important to note here, is that I am not declaring that the phenomena I compare YouTube Poop to are exactly similar. I am merely seeking a possible lineage for YouTube Poop. The compared phenomena bare similarities but also differ on certain points.

The diagram below shows how the three main traits of YouTube Poop are related. Every circle is interconnected. It is possible to position a YTP in the very centre of the diagram, which means that the video subverts, provokes the medium and used radical montage techniques.

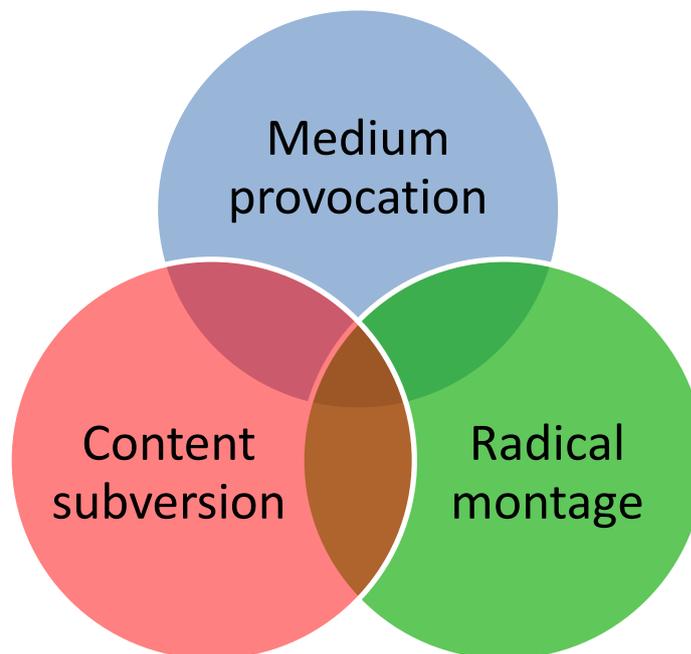


Figure 5. Three main traits of YouTube Poop

It is also possible for a video to be categorized in the blue top circle, meaning that its main purpose is to provoke the medium. Videos cannot be positioned in the overlapping parts of two circles, for instance: only the blue and the green circle, as all three traits are always present in a YouTube Poop. If one of them is not, it is not a genuine Poop. This means that the content is always subverted, the medium is always provoked (in the very

least because copyrighted material is used) and Poopers always challenge the video and audio editing software.

2.1 Content subversion

With the first main trait the focus lies on subverting and making fun of the content used. I call this *content subversion*. The content used here is media content, meaning audio and video material and sporadically still photography. The users poke fun at the original material by montaging it in certain ways that decontextualize it and therewith subverting the original message. They make it funny, absurd or both. The nature of the subversion or the jokes can vary from endless repeating of one action, to sentence mixing until the characters pronounce different (vulgar) words and sentences, to juxtaposing a song over a scène, to mixing scenes and actions in order to make a different story line, to a combination of all the above and more. Some YouTube Poops are very banal, some are repetitive, some are violent, some are sexist, some are *glitchy* or completely random, some have narrative. This list will have to be replenished in the future and probably isn't complete now. But it gives an indication of what YouTube Poop is all about.²⁸

Ways to recognize Poops that lean towards this trait in particular, are that they have a more "complicated representation" of the material in comparison to the Poops that endlessly loop one action for instance. Most of the time, there will be a narrative in this type of Poop. Furthermore, much different media content can come to bid in the same video, which emphasizes our attention even more on the material. A Pooper who mainly creates material ridiculing Poops is cs188. He utilizes the medium and the editing software for the purpose of ridiculing the material and making people laugh. He doesn't want to be *flagged*, as some early Poopers did. That is not his purpose (he gets angry when a video is taken down).

Subverting content was done before YouTube Poopers did it. A fine example of subverting others' material was the method of *détournement*, practiced by the Situationist International movement. Shortly, this meant taking cultural expressions from the previous (and therefore present, by legacy, according to the SI) age and combining them into something new, with the purpose of "go beyond them" (Debord 1956). In an influential article, 'Mode d'emploi du *détournement*', Guy Debord explained that 'anything can be used', but there are some rules. For instance,

The distortions introduced in the detoured elements must be as simplified as possible, since the main impact of a *détournement* is directly related to the conscious or semiconscious recollection of the original contexts of the elements (Debord 1956).

²⁸ For the table with the list of conventions, see page 12.

The Situationists were known for creating art, books, articles, films, graffiti's and comics. Not all these expressions were détournements, but a significant amount was. Artists like Francis Bacon created détournement paintings, for instance.

Needless to say, détournement was practiced with a heavily ideological perspective. The act was invented to improve the contemporary way of living, critiquing it while at the same time correcting it. 'It is a real means of proletarian artistic education, the first step toward a *literary communism*' (Debord 1956).

YouTube Poopers, however, have not expressed such an ideology (yet). Their main goal is not necessarily to *improve* people and their lifestyles, but to make them laugh. Nevertheless, these cultural expressions have in common that they are both subverting existing content and its message.

Another phenomenon YouTube Poop can be compared to on the level of material ridiculing is *culture jamming*. Mark Dery explains in his text 'Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs' that:

"Jamming" is CB slang for the illegal practice of interrupting radio broadcasts or conversations between fellow hams with lip farts, obscenities, and other equally jejune hijinx. Culture jamming, by contrast, is directed against an ever more intrusive, instrumental technoculture whose operant mode is the manufacture of consent through the manipulation of symbols. The term "cultural jamming" was first used by the collage band Negativland to describe billboard alteration and other forms of media sabotage (Dery 1993, p. 5).

Culture jammers were known for distorting the message brought across by companies trying to sell products or "indoctrinating" people otherwise. Techniques include "Subvertising," the production and dissemination of anti-ads that deflect Madison Avenue's attempts to turn the costumer's attention in a given direction' (Dery 1993, p. 6); Media Hoaxing, 'the fine art of hoodwinking journalists into covering exhaustively-researched, elaborately-staged deceptions' (p. 7) and Billboard Banditry, which include 'anti-promotions, scrawling graffiti on cigarette or liquor ads' (p. 8).

Since the existence of internet, hacking has been an approved method for culture jamming. Also the 'Zine, an online publication that according to Dery is on a low budget, an anti-aesthetic of exuberant sloppiness, and often a mocking, oppositional stance at mass media (Dery 1993, p. 10). Virtual communities are connected via bulletin board systems (BBS's), a platform freed from intervention by companies and governments. Hope is vested on cyberspace. These escapes from mass media aren't perfect (yet), but there are a way to build a world unmediated by authorities and experts (p. 10). This proves that the tradition of culture jamming lives on, even on the digital platform, where still the mass media are "sedating" the public (Jello Biafra in Dery 1993, p. 5). There is a

semiotic warfare going on against the Empire of Signs (mass media). Zines and BBS's help deconstruct the power of the big media companies.

For YouTube Poop one might suggest the same. It is an online continuation of the tradition that is culture jamming. Poopers take the existing message of the material and distort it thoroughly. As established in chapter one, a video isn't a real YouTube Poop video until the original message and story line are altered. The effects that culture jamming and YouTube Poop have are similar to some extent, both distorting the original message, seeking other ways of looking at it and presenting their own view. A difference is that culture jammers want to deconstruct the power of the mass media (companies), whereas Poopers mainly want to make themselves and other people laugh. There are exceptions, however, namely the Poops that express they want to be flagged, the more *medium provoking* type of YTP videos.

2.2 *Medium provocation*

The second YouTube Poop main trait is called *medium provocation*. YouTube Poop videos have the tendency to push the medium to the limit or taunt its hospitality. To name two examples, early Poops could consist of one short excerpt from the used material, such as one spoken word or one action, which would be repeated for as long as the (former) policy of YouTube would allow: ten minutes.²⁹ An opposite example of a YouTube Poop video is a very short excerpt (a few seconds) posted on YouTube with a descriptive title such as 'My Life In 2 Words'. These videos have the same 'YouTube rights' as any other user created video on YouTube such as a thumbnail, a description box, comment space below the video and a change to be in the suggested video list. It is clear that the types of videos mentioned here are playing with the boundaries of the video website YouTube. The first is taking up database and server space, the second is 'polluting' YouTube's features with an overload on very short videos. Moreover, there are videos which bear titles such as 'THIS VIDEO IS BETTER THAN YOUTUBE'³⁰, not to mention the entire spectrum of videos titled 'THIS VIDEO WILL BE FLAGGED' (which are the videos Lovink was mostly referring to earlier).

Furthermore, every YouTube Poop video is provoking media content companies, as none of the content used belongs to the Poopers themselves. The battle for existence is continuously fought by both sides, the Poopers and the media companies, and sometimes one wins, sometimes the other.

²⁹ Some examples are: 'the king says mah boi for 10 minutes' created by superjoe96, 18 January 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fTLrOpVFsa>>; 'LUIGI SAYS SPAGHETTI FOR TEN MINUTES IN HORRENDOUS QUALITY' created by lulzcorrupt, 11 January 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXykpda5Z4s>> and 'Zelda Smiles Like a Retard for Ten Minutes' created by NesterTheToaster, 15 April 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1I791EKiUc>>.

³⁰ 'THIS VIDEO IS BETTER THAN YOUTUBE' uploaded by SvenFletcher, 12 March 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFk8mnr7UWQ>>

Provoking the medium on which one is being broadcasted or represented has also been done before. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (BBC One, 1969-1974) is notorious for its witty mockery on all kinds of subjects, including habits, professions, cultural expressions and the BBC, their channel. Not only do they poke fun at hosts and television formats, they sometimes explicitly name the BBC and make jokes about it. A good example is the intro of the episode 'Archeology Today'. A voice over introduces the nature of shows the BBC will be airing: "there's variety, [...] and for those of you who don't like variety, there's variety. And of course there'll be sport" (*Monty Python's Flying Circus*, 1970).

The crew of *Monty Python* is trying to make the viewer reflect on the medium and channel it is broadcasted on. As one of the members, Terry Jones, explained in a television interview, people at the head of the television companies are pretending to know what people would like to see on television, but in fact they don't. When a company is trying to sell a product, they have to pretend to know what people like. Jones said that *Monty Python* doesn't know what people like either and the crew just film sketches they enjoy filming. 'The BBC for some reason put it on' (Terry Jones in KERA-TV interview, 1975). In short, *Monty Python* is a show that explores the boundaries of what a television channel will accept in broadcasting self mockery. Which apparently is quite a lot. Provoking the medium is executed by *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Another illustrating example of a cultural expression that provokes the 'medium' or context is the Dada art movement, or rather, anti-art movement. During World War I in Europe, Dada artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Hugo Ball perceived the world to be in chaos. As Cyndi Conn explains:

A powerful and passionate reaction against World War I and the corruption of what they considered "bourgeois" society, Dada erupted as a remonstrance against traditional art and culture while youths across the continent perished by the millions. Dada was a rejoinder to the insanity and atrocities of World War I and the socio-political structures that gave rise to its gruesome and deadly conflict (Conn p. 2).

This led Marcel Duchamp to put a urinal upside down into the museum in 1917. *Fountain* (Duchamp 1917), as he called the piece, was part of the *readymades*, Duchamp's name for ordinary manufactured objects which he altered minimally and declared art. He was critiquing the traditional art and culture scene. The context of a museum determines whether an object is art or not. By placing a urinal into a museum and declaring it art, Duchamp was mocking the art scene. The museum is hereby mocking itself, devaluing the art scene. At the same time, paradoxically, this act can be seen as pure art.

How is YouTube Poop related to this? The Poop videos are also exploring the boundaries of what is acceptable, here for YouTube, its viewers and the media companies. Dada wouldn't have been anti-art if it hadn't been placed inside a museum at some point, YouTube Poop wouldn't be the same if it wasn't posted on YouTube. The medium and the context are very important for these two cultural expressions; it is fundamentally required to be in that particular context for them to have meaning. Of course they can expand to other platforms, but it is good to keep in mind where they originated and where their substances lie. Lastly, the names 'Dada' and 'YouTube Poop' bear similarities in style and intention.

2.3 *Radical montage*

The third important YouTube trait I call *radical montage*. By that I mean the habit of Poopers to stretch the possibilities of the video and audio editing programs and use them in an unconventional way. The way the Poopers use the software is essentially what could be possible if the user but dared to use all the functions it has to offer. For instance, some color effects are never used by professional video editors. But the Poopers won't hesitate to use this effect if it helps to achieve their goal: making people laugh. One can recognize mainly montage challenging Poops by the amount of (different) effects used. The type of Poop leaning towards this characteristic in particular can include music, as sound mixing costs a lot of time to do (therefore spending a lot of time editing). The more time the Pooper spent with the editing software, the more it will become a challenging montage. It also involves some muscle-flexing from the creator's part. In the world of YouTube Poop, you are more likely to be respected when you know your way around the editing software.

In the past, there have been several movements and film artists that have innovated in their montage techniques. One of them is the Soviet Montage Movement, with a blooming period between 1925 and 1930 (Bordwell & Thompson 1994: p. 124) Especially Sergei Eisenstein's film *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potempkin*, 1925) was hugely innovative in its time. The search for dynamism resulted in a high number of shots per action and movie. Filmmakers broke individual actions down into more shots than just one, as was custom in Hollywood. The Soviet Montage Movement introduced *overlapping editing*, shots repeating (part of) the action from the previous shot, and *elliptical cutting*, where time is skipped using *jump cuts*.

Another movement that was fond of using jump cuts was the Nouvelle Vague (or New Wave) that originates in France of the late fifties and sixties. It consisted of young film makers who were able to buy a camera, which were starting to become cheaper and more easy to handle and carry outside instead of only in the studio (Bordwell & Thompson 1994: p. 440). The Nouvelle Vague directors filmed on the street and used the power of fragmentary, discontinuous editing. They didn't consider Soviet Montage

unrealistic and manipulative as older directors did, and montage became a source of inspiration. 'At the limit, 1960s directors pushed toward a collage form. Here the director builds the film out of staged footage, "found" footage (news-reels, old movies), and images of all sorts (advertisements, snapshots, posters, and so on)' (p. 440). Also, the New Wave directors were not all educated in making film, which resulted them to appropriate techniques educated filmmakers would never dare or think of.

In both of these movements we can see similarities with YouTube Poop. First, the daring montage techniques of the Soviet Montage Movement, based very much on their way of editing footage. The jump cuts and overlapping editing, showing an action more than one time, are recognizable. The inexperienced filmmakers of Nouvelle Vague were using all different kinds of material and edited them daringly. This is true for YouTube Poopers as well. They are inexperienced, start up their video editing software (standard on their computer, so widely available), import some random clips and commence trying out the options.

All of the comparisons above can help understand the lineage of YouTube Poop. However, it isn't said that every Pooper knows about Sergei Eisenstein or Dadaism or Guy Debord and even less that they were inspired by it and wanted to continue the tradition. What exactly is the difference between the intentions of these cultural expressions and art forms and YouTube Poop? This I will discuss in the next chapter.

3. A Picture of the Digital: Cultural and Digital Legacy

YouTube Poop is an odd phenomenon. We have seen that there are similarities with other cultural phenomena from the past, but they are not exactly alike. However helpful it is to compare YouTube Poop with other aesthetic forms and traditions, a definite explanation must be founded on literature. For this, I will utilize a broad range of theories. Every theory used has a purpose and although they do not always coincide with each other, together in this thesis they serve a similar goal. United in and by this chapter, these versatile theories help forming an understanding of YouTube Poop.

3.1 The Picture: cultural legacy

Alan Liu has made a rough sketch of aesthetics through the ages, and split them up into aesthetic foundation, ideology and form. His table below shows that the Postmodern aesthetics form exists of pastiche, collage, assemblage, sampling, etcetera. This coincides with YouTube Poop perfectly. Poopers grab all the material they want to use and remix, collage, sample and edit it however they like. The table also shows that the aesthetic foundation of Postmodernism lies in "Postindustrial" reality, mass culture, advanced technology and media, information technology and digital media. The reason for the question mark can be that Liu is still considering what to put there, or that this is a question he wanted to pose his audience, as the table was part of notes for class. However the case, it is clear that remix culture is typically Postmodern with influences from Modernism.

Aesthetic Foundation (philosophical, sociological, economic basis for art)	Aesthetic Ideology (beliefs that justify the existence of art or explain what art is for)	Aesthetic Form (characteristic formal principles)
Classicism through Renaissance		
Universal Nature Agrarian Society	Mimesis: Truth + Beauty ("subversion," too)	Wholeness, Harmony, Proportion, Symmetry, Balance ("Variation," too) —e.g., Aristotle, classical architecture, "serpentine line of beauty"
Enlightenment through 19th-Century		
Particular Nature, Social Reality Bourgeois Society, Early Industrialism	Realism, Originality, Sublimity, Subjectivity ("truth," too) (beginnings of art as critique)	Detail, Variation, Chiaroscuro, "Sublime" Effects ("organic" wholeness, too) —e.g., Realistic novel, picturesque and sublime art, Romantic poetry
Modernism		
Social & Industrial Reality Modern Mass Culture Corporate Culture International Urban Society Modern Technology & Media	"Make it new" Avant-Gardism Expatriatism Anarchism "Critique"	Collage, Montage, Asymmetry ("organic" wholeness, too) —e.g., Max Ernst's collages, Cubism, Sergei Eisenstein's films, "New Typography" & International Style, James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i>
Postmodernism		
"Postindustrial" Reality Contemporary Mass Culture Global & Multinational Corporate Society Advanced Analog Tech & Media (e.g., video) Advanced Telecom & Information Technology Digital Media & Networks	?	Pastiche, Collage, Assemblage, Sampling, Appropriation, Multitask "Windows," Random Access —(Examples)

Figure 6.
Alan Liu's sketch of the lineage of aesthetics

Seeing the lineage of aesthetics neatly displayed in a table makes it that much easier to understand the past and present. Also, it helps in placing the cultural phenomena of the previous chapter in perspective. The ideologies of 'make it new' and 'critique' have originated in Modernism, and I think they are still appropriate for Postmodernism. Collage and montage also existed before Postmodernism. One might say that these two forms of cultural expression have grown exponentially in influence since the web. With tools as copy and paste at hand, remixing is now of daily matter.

Remix culture has its origins in music. Eduardo Navas confirms this in his studies.

Generally speaking, remix culture can be defined as a global activity consisting of the creative and efficient exchange of information made possible by digital technologies. Remix, as discourse, is supported by the practice of cut/copy and paste. The concept of Remix that informs remix culture derives from the model of music remixes which were produced around the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York City, with roots in the music of Jamaica. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Remix [...] has been ubiquitous in art, music and culture at large; it plays a vital role in mass communication, especially in new media (Navas 2009: p. 4).

Navas emphasizes the role of digital technology and new media in remix culture. Cut/copy and paste is an important feature of remixing which is greatly stimulated by new media and digital technology. Music and art benefit from this, but also culture at large.

3.2 The digital: a heritage from cyberspace

Following this argumentation, one will quickly turn to software studies authors like Lev Manovich and Alexander Galloway. Studies on the characteristics of the digital make clear that the web is optimized for easy distribution and appropriation of any content. It is designed to withstand nuclear attacks; if one node should shut down, an information package sent from one computer (node) to another, would find its way to its destination through different nodes (Barbrook 2007; Galloway 2004). As Galloway puts it, 'The Internet is based not on directionality nor on toughness, but on flexibility and adaptability.' (Galloway 2004: p. 30). The open and dynamic shape of the web is essential for the easy distribution of content. The web was not designed to take into account limits like copyright laws. Video editing software also possess this open shape. In fact, the natively digital is built upon user convenient principles that lead to easy appropriation of content, cut/copy and paste, editing, remixing, spreading and so on. This is more true than ever since the coming of Web 2.0.

Christopher Kelty has done a more social study on the web, regarding its creators: the programmers, the 'geeks'. The Geeks are a recursive public with ideals they want to appropriate to the web.

The notion of a recursive public as a social imaginary specific to the Internet draws together technical practices of coding and designing with social and philosophical concepts of publics to highlight specific contemporary ideas of social or moral order that just as often take the form of argument-by-technology as they take the form of deliberative spoken or written discussion (Kelty 2005, p. 186).

Geeks have much influence on the web, being the programmers. By writing the code, they are implementing their ideals onto the web and they preferably don't want the least disturbance. Their ideals are creating an open platform which isn't swarming with mass media companies. They don't want to be slowed down in their progress by copyright laws and commercial hustle.

Poopers react to restrictions the same way. When a video is taken down due to copyright infringement, a Pooper will commonly re-post it on his/her backup channel, not rarely accompanied with revengeful remarks in the description box, such as 'Reupload! Eat my shoes HiT! Bwahahahaeekekeke'.³¹

Furthermore, Kelty suggests that the computer scientists arguing for more openness believe in the fact that technologies can relegate the structure of democracy. They put to practice the idea of a technical society by 'redefining civic responsibility as a call to engage in technical criticism of rapidly changing means of representation' (Kelty 2005: p. 188). It has almost become common knowledge that people, especially programmers, geeks and computer scientists, invested great hope into the new platform of Cyberspace.

This is where the roads of the Poopers and the Geeks part ways. As seen with the *détournement* example, Poopers aren't that idealistic. They do provoke the medium and they do subvert the message, but because there is no greater purpose behind this it isn't the same as with the Situationist movement and the Geeks. The latter proved to have many ideals and hopes for the present and the future. Arguing for YouTube Poopers, one can only say they want to make the world a funnier, less serious place. Perhaps they also want a world less dominated by commercialism, but this desire is pronounced nowhere.

Not only the Geeks had hopeful ideas about the web. There have been many groups and individuals who have vested their hopes on cyberspace (Kevin Kelly, Fred Turner's counter cultures, Ted Nelson, etc.). Topping everybody with his fierce 'Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace', though, is John Perry Barlow. He severely warns governments and commercial companies to stay away from this new 'home of the Mind'. Openness is always the key word in this debate. Barlow wants to be freed from

³¹ YouTube user KeeperOfBeans, back-up channel of KeeperOfPorridge. HiT owns children's programs such as Thomas & Friends, a show which is frequently 'Pooped'. Description under video 'Tomarse & The Cocaine Conspiracy' by KeeperOfBeans <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4PUK2QEQL4Q>

limitations set from 'privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force or station of birth', creating a world where 'anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.' (Barlow 1996).

As seen in chapter one, YouTube Poopers are also a "geek community". Furthermore, implied by their actions, they also want openness, mocking the 'flag' option and getting angry when videos or accounts are shut down. You might say that the interests of these geeks are the same as the programmer, computer scientist geeks. However, these intentions are not pronounced and so this remains uncertain.

Before it got a real chance to develop properly, the internet was dripping with hopes for a better future. Today, however, the web is more and more resembling a mass medium like television, with all the advertisement and the companies owning websites and making a fortune off creative people's backs (see the paragraph on YouTube).

Still, for the users this medium is not quite that passive. Especially since Web 2.0, users can talk back. They have more power, can interact with the medium and each other. This is due to (or thanks to) the software and user interfaces. Manovich says it is important to study software because it shapes media behavior (Manovich in Helmond 2007). I couldn't agree more. The limitations and possibilities the software offers, and the user interface translates, are essential for its use.

Luckily, Poopers have posted on their channel what editing programs they use. They include *Windows Movie Maker* (Microsoft), *iMovie* (Apple), *Sony Vegas Pro* (Sony), *Adobe Premiere* (Adobe), *Photoshop* (Adobe) and *Audacity*. Some programs are free, some are (semi)professional programs and cost money (which even so can be avoided by illegal downloading by the 'wizkids'). As discussed before, Poopers will not hesitate to use every effect in the program, as long as it makes people laugh. Especially in using *Sony Vegas Pro* and *Adobe Premiere*, the Pooper will satisfy his/her every need.

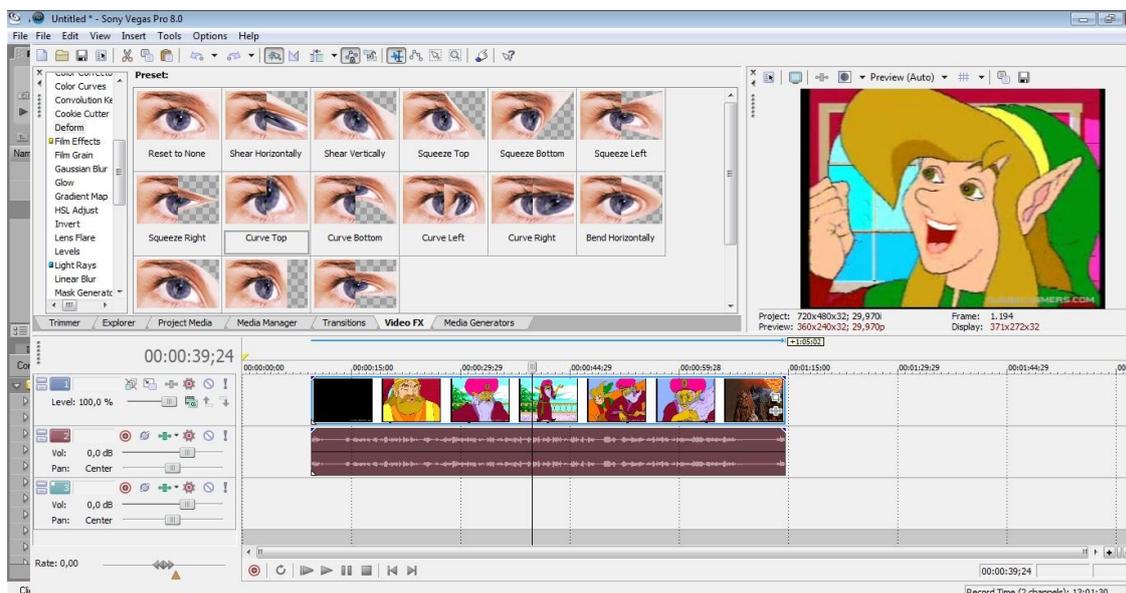


Figure 7. Sony Vegas Pro 8: one tab of many tabs including effects.

The software does shape the way Poopers make their videos. The options they are given, such as how many effects there are and how easy it is to manipulate the material will, in the end, determine what the result will look like. Regarding YouTube Poop it is not a very bold statement to make that technical conventions, which are the ways Poopers are 'supposed to' use the editing programs, shape the aesthetic conventions of the genre substantially. It is the software which made possible the remixing and adapting of the material in the first place.

Taking this one step further is suggesting the natively digital is shaping YouTube Poop. I believe this to be true for the following reason. The natively digital is shaped for openness, flexibility and dynamism. From these fundamentals or ideas sprang the code, the protocol.³² Using this code, the web and the software are built. Using the web and the software, YouTube Poop came into existence. All three, software, web and YTP are based on the natively digital.

This is confirmed by Geert Lovink. In the blog by Anne Helmond for the Video Vortex Conference he states (paraphrased):

Online video is renegotiating its (problematic) relationship with cinema. It deals with cinematographic principles versus the principles of the online age. We cannot directly transfer the cinematographic principles into the online age as new media has its own specificities. YouTube is not just video on the web but YouTube is a natively digital object (Lovink in Helmond 2007).

Lovink's call for a different approach should be answered. New media are essentially different from old media. They are digital. As said before, users have more power on new media platforms. Users can comment on virtually anything on the web nowadays. Their opinions can be posted freely. Their voices can be heard. But are they heard?

Lovink says they are not necessarily heard. In his text 'Nihilism and the News. Blogging as a mental condition' (Lovink 2009), he says that all the blogs on the web are an endless stream of mini-opinions, a cry for attention that can never be saturated. There is criticism, multiplicity, subjectivity and above all ubiquity, a 'Cosmos of Micro-Opinions'. Why do people blog? Because they are unhappy with the way mass media run the world. The web provides democratization. But this brings with it normatization and banalization. We live in techno-social conditions, in which a digital divide is lurking. Our behavior is, according to Geert Lovink, shaped by software, which creates these techno-social conditions, which lead to democratization, normatization and banalization, which in turn lead to criticism, cynicism and multiplicity, which ultimately leads into the decline in Belief in The Message (The Message being the old mass media). We don't buy

³² See Galloway 2004 for more on this subject.

everything the mass media want us to believe anymore. But what has replaced this growing emptiness?

Nothing. This is problematic on one hand, because there is the danger of staying behind with nothing and becoming pessimistic. But on the other hand, this is wonderful, because people are finally taking back what is theirs: their spirits. Lovink really captured the right words at the end of his article.

Commenting on mainstream culture, on its values and products, should be read as an open withdrawal of attention. The eyeballs that once patiently looked at all reports and ads have gone on strike. [...] It is this ongoing state of affairs that causes nihilism, and not revolutions, to occur. Seen in the light of established structures of meaning, blogs bring on decay. Each new blog is supposed to add to the fall of the media system that once dominated the 20th century. [...] What's declining is the Belief in the Message – this is the nihilist moment, and blogs facilitate the culture as no platform has ever done before. Sold by the positivists as 'citizen media' commentary, blogs assist users in their crossing from Truth to Nothingness. [...] Bloggers are nihilists because they are 'good for nothing'. Posting their messages on nirvana, they turn their futility into a productive force. They are the nothingists who celebrate the death of centralized structures of meaning and ignore accusations that they produce only noise (Lovink 2009).

This theory can be tested with YouTube Poop. There are four options. One, all Poopers are against the mass media companies, YouTube's commerciality and conformist viewers. They know what they don't like about it, but not exactly what the goal of their critique is or what they want to accomplish with their videos. They are nihilists, believers in Nothingness.

The second option is that they believe in themselves, their own power as contributing people. Their two-second videos are rewarded with the same interface style and "YouTube rights" as a speech by Barack Obama, president of the United States. They might truly believe in equality, democracy, openness, and of course in Geek culture. They might really be fed up with mass media and their so called Truth and Message.

The third option is that they sincerely want to make people laugh, and it just happens to be at cost of YouTube and the used material. By the looks their channel descriptions, the latter is clearly very important to them. Especially to contemporary Poopers.

The fourth option is that it is a complex combination of the above.

3.3 Early and contemporary Poops: the big shift

This leads me to argue that there is a big difference between early YouTube Poop videos and contemporary Poops. Early Poopers did have the will to confuse people and wake

them up from their conformist sleep. The 'This video will be flagged' videos were meant to accuse YouTube for not being open, for users are not allowed to post anything they want. Early Poopers took the cyberspace legacy at heart and fought for an equal and open web, on which anything can happen, as long as it isn't dominated by commercialism.

But once viewers understood better what YouTube Poop was about, it became more iconic, more about making people laugh. The ideals have been shoved to the sideline, perhaps by Poopers being overwhelmed by their success. YouTube Poop has become a real web video genre with its own recognizable stylistic conventions. The cultural influence is more on the foreground here. Growing up in a mediated world immersed by Postmodern aesthetics, spotting the success of the web video genre 'YouTube Poop', Poopers want to contribute to it and perhaps gain some fame. Contemporary Poops are less idealistic and more about entertaining an increasingly wide audience. For example, contemporary Pooper KeeperOfPorridge posted on his channel that he makes Poops when his 'internet is dead' or when he is 'just bored to death'.³³ This doesn't sound very idealistic at all. This is about entertainment. Contemporary Poopers are the nihilist Lovink sees emerging on the web, except for the part where they fill out the emptiness with laughter and a fair share of confusion.

Still, every single YouTube Poop video has roots in Postmodernism, past and present culture and the natively digital. The contemporary Poops, too, emerged from the ideals for an open space.

YouTube Poop has a geek community with members skilled with a computer and loving to play video games, drawing cartoons and watching anime strips/series. YTP is a new media phenomenon which is developing rapidly and might turn out to become something different all the same in the future. Understanding it and capturing the moment now will help us understand it - today and tomorrow.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed YouTube Poop, a web video genre and geek community. Studying YouTube Poop has been very interesting and fruitful. Being aware of the fact that there are many more internet cultures out there not much unlike YTP, I can only encourage people to go observe this "scum" of the web. It will lead you to explore hidden corners of the web and to learn about things previously unknown. For the curious scientist, the internet offers many places and phenomena to study. And, knowing that permanence isn't guaranteed on the web, it is better to commence gathering data as soon as possible!

³³ Channel description of KeeperOfPorridge, May 2011. <<http://www.youtube.com/user/KeeperOfPorridge>>

In sum, YouTube is a creative but commercial platform. YouTube Poop has been defined on the internet, but not much by scholars. YouTube Poop has specific characteristics and stylistic conventions, such as repetition, vulgar jokes, sentence mixing and randomness. Poops can be split up into two categories: early Poops and contemporary Poops. The first are more about provoking the medium, the latter about ridiculing the material.

There are three main traits of YouTube Poop: *medium provocation*, *content subversion* and *radical montage*. A Poop always possesses all three, but can lean towards one trait in particular. Using this theory as a base, YouTube Poop was compared to past cultural expressions and phenomena, including *détournement*, culture jamming, Monty Python, Dadaism, and cinematic art movements. This study showed that YouTube Poop has cultural fundamentals in Modernism and Postmodernism, and that comparing is useful, but does not give a full explanation.

Chapter three clarified the resonance of Postmodernism in YouTube Poop. It also showed that YouTube is a natively digital object and should be studied as such. In the early days of the web, great hopes have been invested in the new platform of Cyberspace. Hopes for openness and democracy. And the fact of the matter is that users have more power on the web than they did on mass media. Users can talk back, interact and post for their own. However, the activism and resistance against conformism we saw with culture jammers and Dadaism does not exist on the web as much (anymore).

The early Poops were mocking the system by posting videos with controversial titles and sarcastically wanting their videos be taken down. They had an undertone of critique against conformism and silencing. The contemporary Poops, on the other hand, are much more about entertaining and using iconic materials and jokes.

YouTube Poop has fundamentals in Modern and Postmodern culture, and in the natively digital. Although it is not a strict continuation of critique culture, there are similarities. The natively digital, and the web, have made it possible for users to gain more power and autonomy. Because the web is relatively open and democratic, users can talk back and show their opinion. They can make their voices be heard and can stand up against the domination mass media. YouTube Poop is an example of a cultural expression which in the least doesn't take copyright laws and other conformist hustle into account, and wants to put up a fight against the mass media at best. Whatever the case, YTP has done a good job in annoying media content companies and provoking YouTube.

Perhaps a day will come when the Poopers are no longer blinded by their success and will follow in the footsteps of Duchamp, Guy Debord and the computer Geeks. Until then, let's have a laugh at cost of the poorly drawn Zelda cartoons.

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Figures

Figure 1 (cover): 'YouTube Poop logo'. Wikitubia.

<http://youtube.wikia.com/wiki/File:Old_YouTube_Poop_logo.png>

Figure 2: Screenshot of YouTube interface. <<http://www.youtube.com/>>

Figure 3. Thomas 'O' Face by KeeperOfBeans.

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Figure 4. '[YTP] Pooping the Charts Vol. 4 - Rebecca Black and Justin Bieber Take A Dump Together' created by cs188, 18 March 2011

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Figure 5: Three main traits diagram.

Figure 6: 'Aesthetic ideology'. Alan Liu. *Notes for Class 5*. Literature and the Culture of Information, 10 January 2001. 16 May 2011.

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Figure 7: Screenshot of *Sony Vegas Pro 8*. Sony Creative Software Inc., 2007. May 2011.