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MEDIA LITERACY

"Cool" engagements with YouTube: Part 2

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In "'Cool' engagements with YouTube: Part 1" (Trier, 2007), I discussed YouTube (www.youtube.com), the video-sharing website where users can both view and upload homemade videos and video clips from sources such as films and television programs. I drew upon McLuhan's (1995) theory of "hot" and "cool" media: "Hot media are...low in participation, and cool media are high in participation" (p. 23). At the moment, YouTube is the king of cool media.

I then explained the role that YouTube played in a graduate course that I taught titled Cultural Studies and Education. In the course, the students and I hunted for YouTube videos that articulated ideas found in the required readings, especially those found in the weekly chapter readings from Klein's (2002) book *No Logo*. I gave examples of some videos shown during the seminar that focused on Klein's chapter "Culture Jamming." All the videos shown during class were also posted on the course Blackboard site (e.g., www.blackboard.com). By the end of the semester the students and I had gathered dozens of videos, which formed a treasure trove of mutually constructed knowledge for the course. I ended that column by asking what kind of cool engagements can take place with YouTube as part of the everyday practices of middle and high school teachers and students, which is the focus of this follow-up column.

Before turning to that discussion, however, it is necessary to provide an important update about YouTube since my previous column went to press. The search engine Google recently purchased YouTube for US$1.6 billion. Since Google's acquisition of YouTube, there has been much speculation about the fate of copyright protected videos, which are the very videos that have set YouTube apart from other video-sharing websites. The other sites prevent such videos from being uploaded (see Weinman, 2006). In his *San Francisco Chronicle* article "Copyright Questions Dog YouTube," Kopytoff (2006) began by observing that YouTube "is facing the biggest challenge of its brief but gilded life: complaints about copyright infringement that could destroy its cool factor" (p. D1). Kopytoff added that "Google's deep pockets—it has $10.4 billion in cash—offers a big potential payday for aggrieved copyright holders." However, as Kopytoff also reported,

> Attorneys who have no business ties to YouTube said the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, passed at the urging of the Internet industry [in 1998], largely protects YouTube from liability if it were to be sued for illegal uploads. Under the federal law, web sites have limited responsibility for what users post. YouTube doesn't have to police the web site. It's only required to remove clips if asked to do so by the rights holders. (p. D1)

Kopytoff (2006) goes on to explain that it is likely that revenue-sharing deals will be struck between Google and various large media companies—deals that will allow copyright protected video material to remain on YouTube. For example, Kopytoff explained that in a deal between Google and the Universal Music Group, "YouTube gets access to thousands of music videos and allows YouTube users to add Universal's music to their home videos. A separate deal with CBS Corporation gives YouTube access to clips from programs such as *Survivor*, *CSI*, and *The Late Show With David Letterman*.

While Google and media corporations negotiate revenue-sharing deals, teachers can take advantage of the pedagogical potential of YouTube immediately. In the rest of this column, I will discuss a few of the main features of YouTube and suggest some of the ways that teachers and students can engage with the YouTube website. (The column might be best read while logged onto the YouTube webpage in order to perform the various search and save actions that I will be describing throughout.)

Seek and ye shall (maybe) find (and maybe find too much)

Searching YouTube is easy. In the Search box, you simply type either a word or phrase that seems likely to bring up a desired video and then click the Search button. When a search is successful, a thumbnail image of a video appears, and to the right of the image the following information is provided: the video title, the video's time span, the "tags" (keywords) used by the video uploader to describe the video, the date the video was added, the uploader's *username*, the category of the video (e.g., music, entertainment, comedy), the number of "views" the video has received, a red-star rating by viewers, and the number of times the video has been rated by viewers.

If a search phrase does not yield any of the desired results, one possibility is that no videos on the topic have been uploaded. For example, at the time of my writing the search phrase "T.S. Elliot" elicits the message "No videos found for 't s elliot.'" When a search comes back with no results, another possibility is that the search term has been misspelled. Unlike searching with Google, which will suggest a correct spelling when a misspelled word is used in the search box, YouTube does not offer any such suggestion. So, if a search does not yield any desired results, be sure to try various spellings. For example, if you search with the word *kareowac*, no results appear. But if you search with *Kerouac*, over a hundred videos appear, many of which feature the author of *On the Road* (1976, Penguin).

Though searching YouTube is easy, a simple search phrase can yield some challenging results. For example, if one wishes to view video clips featuring the musician, poet, and actor Tom Waits, the logical search phrase "Tom Waits" yields over 1,000 results. When a search yields too many videos, a few tips for narrowing the search can be helpful.

One tip for narrowing a search that initially yields a plethora of videos is to focus on the username of the person who has uploaded the video. By clicking on the username, you are taken to the user's personalized YouTube page, which includes all of the user's videos. Often, similar videos appear on the user's page. For example, the username *TarenFox* appears many times as an uploader of Tom Waits videos, and TarenFox's personalized YouTube page includes 125 Tom Waits videos, which is a much more manageable group of videos than over 1,000 of them. Another tip is to examine the video titles for any patterns. In the case of the initial search for Tom Waits videos, you might recognize that an album or song title often accompanies "Tom Waits" in the video's YouTube title. So including a title should lead to far fewer results. This indeed happens when "Tom Waits" and the song title "God's Away on Business" are used together, leading to only 10 results. A third search tip is to take note of the

tags (keywords) used by the video uploader to describe the video. These descriptive terms, if they recur often, can help identify related videos. In our example, the term "Letterman" appears often as a tag, identifying appearances by Tom Waits on *The Late Show With David Letterman*, and when "Tom Waits Letterman" is searched, only 21 videos appear.

Later, I will say more on searching YouTube for videos, but first I need to introduce a few essential ideas that will help to frame my return to this topic.

Playing favorites in the classroom

A teacher can incorporate YouTube videos into his or her teaching by showing selected videos in the classroom as part of various lessons. To show YouTube videos, the teacher's classroom should have Internet access and the teacher should have a projector connected to a computer. This will enable the teacher to link to the YouTube website and show videos on a large screen. (It would be impractical to gather a large group of students in front of a small computer screen to view the video.)

Of course, the videos that a teacher will go in search of and show will depend on the teacher's subject matter, the makeup of the group of students he or she is teaching, and the purposes of a particular lesson. My intent here is not to recommend particular videos for teachers to show during lessons; rather, I wish to highlight some key aspects of the preparation process of incorporating videos into one's teaching.

One key aspect involves saving videos so that when you are ready to show them in class they can be immediately accessed. Saving videos streamlines the process of showing videos in the classroom by eliminating the (dead) time it would otherwise take to search for one during class. Though it is easy to download YouTube videos to a computer's hard drive with free conversion software, I will highlight a way to save videos that uses two important features available on the YouTube website.

The best way to save YouTube videos is to create a YouTube account. Creating such an account is free and easy to do—you simply log onto the YouTube webpage, select the Sign Up option, provide some basic required information in the Join YouTube section (i.e., e-mail address, country, postal code, gender, date of birth), and create a username and password. Why create an account? Though a person can access and view YouTube videos without subscribing to the website, only subscribers can save videos for future viewing. Subscribers can do this by saving videos to a page called My Favorites. To save a video you simply click the Save to Favorites option that appears below the video frame.

This My Favorites page also has a feature called Create Playlist. What Create Playlist enables is the capacity to select related videos from the My Favorites page and move them to a more specific playlist page. Creating a playlist of selected videos entails clicking on the Create Playlist button, providing information on the Copy/Edit Playlist page (i.e., the playlist name, a description of the videos to be found in the playlist, and a few tags), and clicking the Save Playlist Info button. Once a playlist page is created, you simply select videos from the My Favorites page (by clicking in the small box next to a video) and then send the video to the playlist by selecting the name of the playlist from the Copy Videos To drop down menu.

Cool hunting and gathering

Having discussed some of the basics related to searching for and saving YouTube videos, I am now in a position to return to the topic of searching and discuss it through the concept of cool hunting and gathering. Drawing on McLuhan's (2005) notion of *cool* as meaning participatory and popular, as well as on Klein's (2002) discussion of the corporate process of hiring young, hip

"cool hunters" to search out pockets of cutting-edge lifestyles, I conceptualize the act of searching YouTube for videos that are relevant to pedagogical and learning purposes as a form of cool hunting and gathering (see Trier, 2007, for a detailed discussion).

Two important, intertwined search aspects enabled by YouTube are immediacy and availability. In other words, a teacher can immediately discover whether videos about a subject are available. For example, I have a playlist of videos that I show secondary English preservice teachers to illustrate how an English teacher can introduce a new author to students by showing selected videos of authors who are either reading their work or being interviewed. Among these are videos (searchable by the following video titles, which appear here in parentheses) of Jack Kerouac (*Kerouac*), Charles Bukowski (*Bukowski*), Bob Dylan (*Bob Dylan—Subterranean Homesick Blues*), Maya Angelou (*Taffy digs through her files to find a Maya Angelou clip*), Malcolm X (*Malcolm X: Position on Policies of Black Nationalism*), Toni Morrison (*Toni Morrison on 9-11*), Saul Williams (*DJ Krust & Saul Williams—Coded Language*), Ken Kesey (*Ken Kesey on Saddam Hussein and the Mind Parasites*), Maggie Estep (*Maggie Estep—Hey Baby*), Billy Collins (*Forgetfulness—Billy Collins Animated Poetry*), and many others. Though most of these video clips are probably available in "hard copy" on videocassettes or DVDs, it is easy to imagine the great amount of time, effort, and money that would go into gathering them together from their original formats. It is also easy to imagine a teacher wanting to gather all these videos and DVDs, but not acting on the idea because of the time and money it would take to do so.

In the previous example, I searched for videos featuring specific authors, but I did not know what I would find through the search (so the search was open ended). You can, however, search YouTube for a specific video. For example, I teach a short story in my English methods course titled "Greasy Lake" by T. Coraghessan Boyle (1985). The story is about three suburban teenage boys who precipitate a violent experience that transforms the narrator's worldview. The story takes place some time in the late 1960s or early 1970s (the exact date is unstated though the time is conveyed through various references and details), and the narrator makes several allusions to Vietnam and other military actions. For example, the narrator describes a mistake he made during an incident at Greasy Lake as being as bad as that made "by Westmoreland at Khe Sahn" (p. 3), referring to the infamous Battle of Khe Sahn during the Vietnam War. One interpretation of "Greasy Lake" suggests a parallel between the narrator's own youthful encounter with violence and the experiences of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam during that time. The most important detail that Boyle provides to make this parallel is that each of the boys in the story is 19 years old, which was the average age of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam (Karnow, 1983). I have taught this story for years and had always wanted to compare it to a music video by Paul Hardcastle (1985) titled *Nineteen* (www.google.com/musicl?lid=SbdDq0MfJ1O&aid=V4ShGbBn_BK), but I had no luck in finding the video or recording it from the Music Television (MTV) channel. (For years, I routinely recorded hours of MTV programming, hoping to capture the video, all to no avail.) The video is a perfect media text for this story because it articulates visual footage from Vietnam with lyrics that state, "In World War II the average age of the combat solider was 26 / In Vietnam he was 19." (The entire song is a visual/lyrical sociopolitical critique. See www.80smusiclyrics.com/artists/paulhardcastle.htm.) When I discovered YouTube last year, this MTV music video, which had been haunting my teaching of the story (as an absence), was among the first videos I searched for, and within seconds it appeared. I have happily been using it since then. The point here is that you can find rare and even seemingly impossible video clips from media texts on YouTube.

In the examples just given, I had certain ideas in mind before I searched YouTube, but it is important to note that I have also gotten many

ideas from browsing YouTube. For example, while thinking about a seminar focusing on racist representations constructed in media texts I happened upon a racist cartoon with the YouTube title *Banned Cartoons You're a Sap Mr. Jap*, which is a Popeye cartoon shown during World War II. Subsequent searching with the tag phrase "banned cartoons" led to dozens more of these racist cartoons, and I created a playlist of videos to use during class. The cartoons not only provide a visual–aural representation to critique, but also many of them are accompanied by viewer comments, and arguments typically emerge among viewers about whether the cartoons are really racist.

In this section, I have suggested just a few ways that YouTube can be used by a teacher in search of media texts that can be taken up in the classroom for pedagogical purposes. It's important to add, though, that I have not exhausted the possibilities and have only touched upon a few of the most important aspects.

Engaging students with YouTube

Along with showing YouTube videos during class, teachers can also devise assignments that engage their students with YouTube. Though many students are likely to be quite familiar with YouTube, teachers should make sure all students know some of the site's basic features and strategies. One way to do this is to introduce students to the site through a demonstration lecture based on what I have described so far in this article: creating a YouTube account, becoming familiar with the options and information that accompany each YouTube video, searching strategies, and creating My Favorites and Playlists pages.

Once students know these basics, teachers can devise a variety of activities for students that involve YouTube. For example, students can be asked to make presentations on a video of their own choosing, such as showing a music video and then explaining the history of the artist or providing an interpretation of the song lyrics. Another assignment might be for a student to search on his or her own (either at home or in a computer lab) for specific videos and write a response paper about them. Afterward, students could discuss the media texts in class. For example, students could be assigned a series of 12 videos that can be found on YouTube by searching with the phrase "Boston Public, n-word vignette." The videos in this series comprise a vignette in which a white teacher in the television drama *Boston Public* attempts to engage his students in frank and provocative discussions involving racially charged language. Students could watch these videos outside of class and then write a response. A class discussion on the issue could happen afterward. This can all be done in preparation for, say, reading literature that uses racist terms, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2001, Penguin).

Another assignment would be to have students create Playlist pages on topics of their own choosing or on topics assigned by the teacher. One more way to involve students in engaging with YouTube is to have them upload their own videos to YouTube as the culminating "publishing" activity of a movie-making process. This activity can also be introduced by having students search YouTube for similar student-created videos, thousands of which are available on the site. For example, if you search YouTube for the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988, Warner Books), you will find many interesting videos made by students as part of an English or history course. This kind of search for student videos can be done for countless literary works.

How about you and YouTube?

As I mentioned earlier, what I have discussed about YouTube here by no means exhausts all the possibilities for classroom activities, and I am sure that many teachers from a variety of fields have also incorporated YouTube into their peda-

gogical practices. I invite you to e-mail me with your ideas so that I can write a future column that discusses these activities and makes them available to the general readership of the *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy.*

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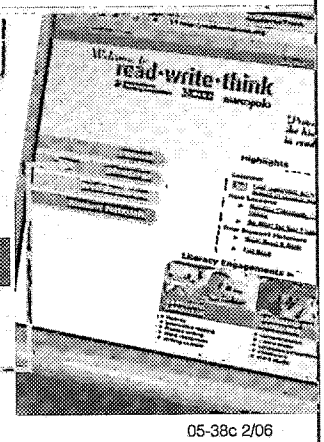

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