

Jackson, Josh, University of Wisconsin-Madison. "YouTube and the User-Generated Online Archive"

It seems natural to identify Google-owned YouTube as a massive, rapidly expanding, and highly adaptable public archive providing two services for users: a) a site in which you can "broadcast yourself" by posting home videos, webcam footage, or other life caching, user-created expressions of vernacular culture, and b) as a preservation storehouse for media texts—music videos, television episodes, film excerpts, TV advertisements, etc. The latter, though not always copyright legal, remains an important component of YouTube as a resource and memory bank for the long-tail of popular culture. For those of us with access to internet broadband, YouTube can be an important part of the process of expressing and revisiting our everyday lives, identities, and interests, allowing users to participate in uploading, annotating, borrowing from, expanding upon, and sharing texts.

It would be a mistake to uncritically celebrate YouTube as an archive, however, for a number of reasons. First, issues of authorship, fair use, and copyright remain contentious and unresolved for the site. Second, YouTube's value as an archive is diminished because of its limited video size and resolution quality. Finally, it's still in the midst of attempting to realize a stable and successful business model, one that may have the potential to restrict or eliminate the diversity of the material available. Thus, while YouTube is currently largely open for users to contribute, there's no guarantee that its relative freedom will remain in a form accepting to both autobiographical and archival video storage and display.

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