

“The explosion in audio-visual creativity is sowing the seeds for a more participative, expressive democracy...”

VIDEO REPUBLIC

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Celia Hannon

Peter Bradwell

Charlie Tims

Foreword

In our work at the European Cultural Foundation we support cultural cooperation and draw policy conclusions from this work. Our goal is to develop cultural policy that is based on lived experiences and has the support of the people we work with.

Over the last six years we have worked with young people from all walks of life and from all parts of Europe through video competitions and workshops. We see their visual testimonies as a key tool in enriching the imagery of Europe.

Building bridges across Europe and across generations is not an easy task to take on. Sometimes you end up stumbling over the familiar hurdles of age, tradition and language. A stakeholder event two years ago is a good example of this.

The audience – the cultural elite of the Netherlands – had just watched a video with a satirical take on Dutch overplanning, scheduling, individualism and sex education produced by a 20-year-old called Sofian. At the end of his video, he is seen waking up from his strict Dutch organised ‘nightmare’ into a beat of Arabic pop music: ‘So, Sofian, do you feel Dutch or Moroccan?’ the host asked. ‘I understand that you were born in Holland?’

Sofian’s face was a mixture of boredom and amusement; it clearly wasn’t the first time he has been asked that question. ‘I am never going to be accepted here as being Dutch,’ he explained. ‘And when I go for the summer to my relatives in Morocco they all see me as the Dutch boy. So why should I care? I am myself.’

The audience seemed confused. As the interview continued, Sofian went on to describe the video as ‘just something funny’ he did in a workshop. Most of the thoughtful questions on identity were dismissed with a shrug.

Afterwards the politicians, novelists and museum directors swarmed around Sofian, trying to understand more about his

thinking. His pragmatic approach, stepping outside boxes, conflicts with the picture painted by the mainstream media of violent clashes about national identity between clearly defined groups. ‘That was one strange experience,’ Sofian said on the train back to Amsterdam.

At the ECF we learned a lot from this evening. But it also further convinced us that it is too easy just to accept that the mainstream debate on intercultural dialogue should remain estranged from the ‘Video Republic’ of the young. It is because of this dislocation that we want to be at the forefront of creating new strategies of engagement that allow us to connect the two worlds, at the same time giving young people the freedom to talk about issues they find important. Liaising between groups in this way can create stronger links between people across Europe, and also generate a sense of European belonging. In a democratic Europe we need these interactions across borders, across media and across generations.

From the start, this research has been affiliated to StrangerFestival, our biggest project on video expression. Together with Demos and Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding about the reasons why young people make videos and what the democratic and cultural potential of all this audiovisual creativity might be. Most of us who are used to reading edited newspapers and watching programmes broadcast by fixed channels have difficulty in understanding the online video world. We look for quality assurance, selection and value statements. Most teenagers and young adults, however, see the richness of the growing visual archive as a source of excitement. As one of the young video makers put it: ‘You don’t have to watch it if you don’t like it.’

This year we organised over 30 video workshops in 20 countries and brought hundreds of young video makers to an international festival in Amsterdam. The researchers in this report argue that we need to provide more people with the tools and skills to express themselves, and throughout StrangerFestival we have also emphasised this idea. The online media landscape is still overly controlled by those who are white, Western and middle class. When we claim that creative

expression online points the way to creating a more ‘expressive democracy’, we as NGOs and governments also have to accept responsibility for democratising access to the Video Republic.

We wish to thank our partners across Europe for their dedication in reaching out to new groups ranging from illegal immigrants in Warsaw to Roma youth in Cluj. The dozens of artists who facilitated these workshops challenged the young makers to dig deeper into their own experiences and managed to treat all makers with respect and dignity. We also thank the European Commission for selecting StrangerFestival as one of the flagship projects of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Their support has made it possible for thousands of young people to talk about things they find important.

We wish to thank researchers Celia Hannon, Charlie Tims and Peter Bradwell for their enthusiasm and clarity of thought. They rightly question many of the current strategies of ‘empowering’ the young. Too often we ask young people to conform to our agenda rather than listening carefully to theirs. Meeting and collaborating with the Demos research team has helped us tremendously in reshaping our own work with youth. We hope that this report also acts as a challenge to established mindsets for others too.

We are extremely grateful to the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, one of the first funders to commit themselves to the StrangerFestival by funding this Demos research. They shared our interest in taking a closer look at the activities of young people before drafting visions about the future of media; their support made this research possible.

On behalf of European Cultural Foundation

Odile Chenal, Deputy Director
Tommi Laitio, Project Leader, StrangerFestival

Introduction

Coming into focus

Inside the darkened, cavernous interior of the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam hundreds of fashionable teenagers from across Europe are gathering for the opening ceremony of the 2008 StrangerFestival, 'Europe's biggest event for young video makers and fans'. The huge renovated gasometer is peppered with flickering TV screens and projections looping one-minute videos made by young people from across Europe. Groups sit on pink bean bags, watching the screens. Others roam the exhibits and stalls navigating through their viewfinders and LCD screens. Out in the entrance young film makers gather to discuss the boards displaying the weekend's programme of how-to workshops about everything from vlogging to video campaigning and table-top movie making.

Later at the opening ceremony we watch Eboman, an audiovisual sample artist, gyrating inside a specially constructed 'SenSorsSuit'. His movements trigger images, sounds and drumloops, which erupt on screens across the stage and in the speakers behind our heads. Periodically he prompts his assistants to feed in live video of people in the audience. He then works these faces into the videos, contorting them in time to the music. The metaphor is clear: we are video.

The StrangerFestival could only have taken place in 2008. The eclectic mix of audiovisual forms, international contributors and sponsors at the festival reflects the rapid rise of internet videos over the past three years. But all this frenetic activity also hints at the excitement and confusion of the moments before something comes into focus.

The falling price of digital technology and the proliferation of broadband access have blown open a whole range of ways for young people to express themselves and communicate with each

other in video. The internet is increasingly shaped around moving images. Video mash-ups, citizen journalism, vlogging, viral-video marketing, community film-making projects, happy-slapping... we can see the audiovisual explosion everywhere.

This pamphlet charts the rise of a ‘Video Republic’ – a new space for expression created primarily by young people. ‘Republic’ from the Latin term *res publica* (‘public thing’ or ‘public matter’) and ‘Video’ from the Latin *videre* (to see): literally, a visual public realm. During the last century, moving images have proved to be the fastest and most compelling way to transfer information between large groups of people. Today the emergence of the Video Republic has driven a massive transfer of expressive power towards young people. This matters for the mainstream media, decision makers and other institutions. Why?

A new place to debate

The Video Republic is a place where personal issues can be rapidly translated into public concerns – the moving image is the fastest way for individuals to project what they think and feel to a wider audience. In this way it has become a new public space for deliberation. Debates about issues as diverse as identity, climate change, culture and politics are being driven by the production and exchange of video. Governments across Europe are searching for a way to connect to it.

A new basis for citizenship

The Video Republic has widened access to visual expression, but not for everyone – many are still held back by the uneven distribution of access and resources. Those making videos have a louder voice; the stories of their lives reach further. Their support and criticism of leaders and governments is heard by more people. Governments across Europe need to reflect on how these social and technological shifts are altering the basis of free speech and creating new types of *expressive* inequality. The European Commission’s 2008 Media Literacy group¹ has already highlighted the importance of being able to interpret and

produce media as a way of supporting citizenship. As young people experience greater freedoms online, it becomes more important to offer them a greater variety of ways to participate and practise active citizenship in their everyday lives.

A new model of change

A closer look at the Video Republic shows one way how we can understand how change happens when more people can speak. Governments and institutions have less control over the airwaves, at a time when influencing public behaviour is more important than ever to achieving public outcomes. Campaigning groups and charities such as Avaaz, Greenpeace and the International Rescue Committee are embracing short viral videos as a key tool to changing people's attitudes. As governments seek to solve collective outcomes by influencing the culture in which we live, they too will need to find more ways of communicating with people through the Video Republic.

Adventures in video

Beyond the StrangerFestival, a cursory glance at video making and new media projects reveals the range of experiments in video across Europe. A number of major actors are intervening in the Video Republic, and all with very different aims:

- Major broadcasters across Europe – from MTV in Warsaw, to the BBC in London and TRT in Istanbul – are searching for different ways to define their relationship to young audiences who are more adept at producing their own videos. Young people find themselves interchangeably treated as TV producers, walk on bit-part players and competitors producing rival TV.
- Politicians are entering the arena. Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, has been vodcasting for two years. Meanwhile in Britain Gordon Brown is running a public 'question and answer' forum on his personal YouTube page, while David Cameron continues to broadcast his weblog WebCameron.

- The European Commission has declared 2008 a year of intercultural dialogue and has funded projects that aim to foster closer ties among the people of Europe. Media and video are a prominent dimension to this.
- The availability of basic video-editing software has prepared the ground for people to use film to give visibility to under-represented or marginalised groups. This often takes place on a local level, for example initiatives like Choices,² a programme of arts activity for young people in the youth justice system in the North Tyneside in the UK.

The Video Republic is in its infancy, and much of the content could easily be regarded as incoherent and trivial. But beneath the surface it is possible to discern the seeds of a more participatory political culture – a way to make the process of collective decision making across Europe more inclusive and more exciting. This potential can be realised, but a series of obstacles lie in the way.

First, gaps in our education systems and pre-existing inequalities mean that the capacity to make videos is not evenly distributed. Second, the ill-defined regulation of new digital worlds constrains what can and cannot be said. But, most crucially, this new visual, public realm is currently adrift from our democracies and processes of decision making. As a result, the creativity and momentum generated by these new patterns of cultural exchange often fails to translate into social change in the offline world.

The Video Republic has primarily been assembled by a generation of young people who would prefer to route-around institutions than oppose them. Their parents and grandparents won their freedoms by challenging governments, but the ‘route-around kids’ would rather contribute to an alternative public realm where they have more power and influence. We need to build more meaningful links between places like the Video Republic and the mainstream, so that we tap into the energy currently locked inside and help our democracies catch up. In this report we outline an approach to achieving this; we call it Expressive Democracy.

This research

This project was funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, based in Helsinki. Demos also worked in partnership with the European Cultural Foundation to carry out research in five countries during 2008. This report is the result of that year-long investigation into young people's use of audiovisual media across Europe.

The project began with an initial stage of background research, drawing together existing academic work, policy documents and statistical data. Throughout the course of the research we also investigated the world of online video; looking at new trends in vlogging, video production and exchange.

We carried out case studies in five countries. This involved gathering information on national trends in youth, participation and new media. In each country we visited week-long video-making workshops organised by the European Cultural Foundation as part of the ongoing Stranger project. The research team visited workshops across Europe during 2008 in Helsinki, Finland (February); Berlin, Germany (March); Iasi, Romania (April); London, UK (April); and Istanbul, Turkey (May). These countries were selected to ensure that the research process spanned as diverse a range of regions as possible – extending to the very edges of Europe.

In each country we met young film makers taking part in the workshops. They were aged between 14 and 25 years old and they had highly varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds. We carried out individual interviews and asked them to fill in surveys. We also interviewed the facilitators and audiovisual artists about their experience in working with young people in new media projects.

Alongside these case studies, we carried out a series of expert interviews (see Appendix 1) in the UK, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Turkey. We met academics, arts practitioners, youth workers, media experts and film makers. We asked them to comment on trends in film making, youth participation, arts education, the creative industries and new technologies. We also visited other new media projects in the UK to learn from alternative approaches to working with technology and young people.

Between 3 and 5 July 2008 we also attended the StrangerFestival in Amsterdam to share initial findings. There, we were able to test our argument with the help of the international experts who attended.

Definitions of Europe and young people

There are a range of definitions of the term ‘Europe’, drawing on political, geographical or trade boundaries. In this report we interpret the word Europe in its broadest sense. Much of our research draws on existing information about the 27 member states of the EU, but we were also keen to look beyond these political borders to include countries such as Turkey.

When we use the term ‘young people’ we refer to the generation who are currently aged between 15 and 25 years old.

Please refer to the glossary in Appendix 2 for explanations of technical terms used in this report.

1 Video Republic

The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own.

Susan Sontag, 1974³

*One Nation under God
has turned into
One Nation under the influence
of one drug
Television, the drug of the Nation
Breeding ignorance and feeding radiation*

Michael Franti, 1992⁴

The most famous piece of user-generated content was filmed a long time before the invention of YouTube. On 22 November 1963 Abraham Zapruder used his Model 414 Zoomatic Camera to film John F Kennedy's motorcade ride along Elm Street in Dealey Plaza. It should have been 30 seconds of celebratory footage showing the President passing through town. Instead, it became one of the most viewed and commented upon pieces of footage in history. And, through its disruption of any official narrative of Kennedy's assassination, the film is perhaps the earliest and best demonstration of the power that comes with placing recording equipment in the hands of the public.

Twenty years later, in 1983, Sony launched its first consumer-focused camcorder – the Betamovie BMC-200. Weighing 2.5kg and costing the equivalent of over €1,000, it was no mass market product. The audience for Betacam movies in 1983 was small. Betacams might have been brought out on sports days, weddings and children's parties. The films were screened in the lounge. Sending them to family in Australia meant packing

up a video in bubble-wrap and expensive international shipping. Fast forward a quarter of a century, and you can buy a second-hand digital video camera on eBay for €70. Most digital cameras and mobile phones now come with a video capturing feature as standard. Webcams are either cheap or already built into our computers. The advent of web streaming services means that moving images can be captured and placed in the public domain for a marginal cost, available to anyone with an internet connection in a matter of minutes. In June 2008 49 per cent of EU 27 households had internet access, with 36 per cent having broadband – up 8 per cent from 2007.⁵ The generation born in 1983 will be 25 in 2008; the idea of ‘personal video’ belongs to them.

The falling price of digital technology and the capacity to distribute information rapidly have created the conditions for millions of people to record and exchange moving images. This was once the preserve of a multi-billion dollar industry, fenced in by prohibitive costs. But that monopoly has been broken and in its place a new theatre of public information has emerged, a loosely connected mass of video creation and exchange. This activity is being driven by personal initiatives, collective endeavours and institutional interventions. It includes aspiring professional film makers and amateur vloggers alike.

This is a realm populated by people who are attracted by the idea that video has a unique power to communicate. It is here where we see opinions, thoughts and feelings turned into video, by people, for other people.

In this chapter we will look at *where* this Video Republic is, what links the videos in it together and how it transfers power to people.

Where is the Video Republic?

As we saw in the introduction, the word ‘republic’ originates from the Latin term *res publica*, which translates as ‘public thing’ or ‘public matter’. The Video Republic is situated in the places where people’s opinions and feelings are made public via the language of moving image. These places may be virtual or

physical. But the ‘universal’ nature of moving images means that these videos weave in and out of different nations, regions, ethnicities and religions, touching on personal, local, national and global concerns. There are three main sites of the Video Republic:

- video-hosting services
- television
- festivals, events and campaigns

Video-hosting services

Video-hosting websites are the most vivid indicator of the growth of the Video Republic. While the process of screening moving images used to be constrained by place and time, video-sharing websites mean that any video can be watched in any country, at any time. Since its launch in spring 2005, it is estimated that YouTube has amassed 100 million videos on its servers, and they are now being uploaded at a rate of nearly 150,000 a day.⁶ It is the third most viewed site on the internet.

During May 2008, French internet users watched 93 videos each – with 25.2 million French internet users (81 per cent of the total French internet audience) watching 2.3 billion videos online.⁷ There are roughly 40 other video streaming services all with a different slant on the same central concept of providing a place for people to watch video.⁸ Tudou in China streams 15 billion minutes of videos – five times more than YouTube. Europe has its own native video-sharing platforms. Daily Motion, based in Paris, serves 26 million videos a day, while RuTube, the Russian YouTube, serves 1 million videos a day from its base in Oryol. Videos on these sites can also be ‘embedded’ in any of the 35 billion pages on the internet, ensuring that video clips can accompany anything and everything we encounter online.

Television

Long before the advent of the internet, traditional broadcasters were laying the foundations of the Video Republic. During the

1980s television became a platform for community-based film-making projects. During the 1990s television caught onto the advantages of screening content directly from their viewers' video cameras. In the UK, 1993 marks the founding of BBC's Video Nation project, which saw Britons starting to talk about their everyday lives in personally recorded video clips on national TV. Groundbreaking for its time, it illustrated how visual records of everyday life, a kind of anthropology of ourselves, could be deeply compelling viewing. Today all the major broadcasters are experimenting with ways of distributing what could loosely be described as 'user-generated content'. In the UK, the BBC established 'BBC Blast', which compromises a TV series, website and series of workshops, which encourage young people to make and distribute videos.

Festivals, events and campaigns

Away from the internet and television, videos find their way into the public domain in a number of other ways. The process of collaborative video making is increasingly used as a way of 'including' marginalised groups within society, bringing local communities together and influencing policy makers and legislators. The Runnymede Trust and Manifesta recently ran a project called *Video ART Postcards*, which helped a number of young people to make 33 short films about slavery's historical legacy.⁹ This was accompanied by educational resource to help teachers use the ART 'Postcards' to explore notions of citizenship.¹⁰ In Belarus, a video magazine distributed on a CD has become a way for young people to express themselves beyond the gaze of the state.¹¹ There are a multitude of nationwide schemes designed to support aspiring film makers such as First Light in the UK,¹² through to international projects such as the StrangerFestival.

Videos can pass in and out of these different sites at different points in their life cycle. The Zapruder film of JFK's assassination appeared in public for the first time in a court room in 1968 before being shown in public on TV in 1975. Today it circulates widely on the internet, providing fuel for conspiracy theorists.

Sorting the Republic

For videos to be understood they need to be identified, categorised and described. When videos are uploaded on video-sharing websites the descriptions relate to the content of the video (for example ‘comedy’, ‘education’ or ‘football’) because that is what visitors to the site most need. This is useful for people who want to watch a video, but it is less helpful for those wishing to understand the Video Republic from the outside.

For example, a simple search on YouTube for videos of the French footballing legend ‘Zinedine Zidane’ yields a news segment about his infamous head-butt in the 2006 World Cup final, doctored videos of the same incident, a *montage* of the doctored videos, a clip of Zidane being interviewed on TV, mobile phone footage of him walking out of a tunnel and a range of videos that pitch his skills against those of other great footballers.

Video-sharing websites tend to emphasise the connections between subject matter, at the expense of background information. The results of this search for Zidane tell us little about *how* those videos were made or *why* they were made. This parcelling together of vastly different kinds of content makes the Video Republic hard to pick apart – much of the time it tends to feel like a confusing wall of audiovisual feedback. As a result, we always seem to be moving through the Video Republic, rather than looking at it from the outside – even when we press play we can never be quite sure what we are going to look at.

In trying to understand the Video Republic, we first need to understand what it was *that people did* to place those videos into the public domain. Looking at the content or the message of a video will tell us little about how moving images are being produced and shared. We need to start by mapping how each video is made.

There are two spectrums on which all videos in the Republic sit. First, how *original* the content is – was it captured by the video creator, or was it ‘recycled’ from elsewhere? Second, the degree to which it has been *edited* – is the content presented in its original form, or has it been altered and reformed by its creator? These different variables give us a way to see past the sorting of video by subject.

Figure 1 The four different kinds of video



This schema leaves us with four different kinds of videos (Figure 1). It is important to note that the processes we describe below are not only being driven by young people. A range of age groups participate in producing these moving images.

Recycled and unedited

The most basic content is found in the bottom right-hand corner of Figure 1. This is almost exclusively footage that has been taken from other broadcasters, clipped and then distributed online. Today, a wealth of news reports, current affairs programmes, sports events and music are being published online by those who have ‘ripped’ them from the original source. The clip of Zinedine Zidane headbutting Marco Materazzi (taken from coverage of the final) fits into this category.¹³

Recycled and edited

This content has been appropriated from elsewhere, but it has been combined with other content in new ways. This includes ‘tribute videos’ to footballers, comedians and pop stars celebrating the best of their skills, jokes and achievements, usually set to music (for example, the video made up of clips of

Zidane's best footballing moments fits into this category). This type of contribution to the Video Republic is at its most powerful when it enables the creator to appropriate old content to communicate new meanings. The political 'mashup' is the primary example of this process. A popular target was the special relationship between Tony Blair and George Bush at the height of the Iraq War. The best known example features them lip-sinking to Diana Ross and Lionel Richie's 1981 hit 'Endless Love'.¹⁴

Original and unedited

This content is recorded by the video maker themselves. It has little or minimal editing. It is exemplified by the vlogging phenomenon, where individuals share their thoughts and feelings in a series of short online videos. This form of video tends to be confessional and intimate, generating very personal relationships between viewers and vloggers. During the course of this research we met 'Nerimon', a UK-based vlogger who has over 22,000 subscribers.¹⁵ He talks about his friends, the internet and his job. Indeed, most online vlogging focuses on the everyday. Citizen journalism – the act of recording 'newsworthy' events (either deliberately or by chance) – also sits in this category.

Original and edited

In technical terms this is the most complicated type of video making; it is the form which is closest to a traditional feature film or documentary. The majority of the content is original and has been edited together to tell a story. Making such films can often involve experts and professionals helping young people to develop their skills. The video-sharing website vimeo has become a popular place to view this type of content. One of the most popular examples of this video was made by Noah Kalina, a 28-year-old New York based photographer who took a photo of himself everyday for six years, and sped the 2,356 photographs into a five-minute animation.¹⁶ The workshops associated with

the StrangerFestival, where young people made one-minute films with guidance from a skilled film maker, are another example of this type of content.

The power of the Video Republic

During a recent speech, the documentary photographer James Nachtwey reflected on the contribution that his profession made to the course of history in the 1960s and in the early 1970s:

I believed the photographers and so did millions of other Americans. Their images fuelled resistance to the war and racism. They not only recorded history, they helped change the course of history. Their pictures became part of our collective consciousness and as consciousness evolved into a shared sense of conscience, change became not only possible but inevitable.¹⁷

Images can shape people's understanding of the world. In the early twentieth-century the Russian film maker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein, along with his American contemporary DW Griffith, found ways of using the power of editing in order to communicate messages to the audience. The use of montage in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* is commonly seen to exemplify the symbolic power of editing. Eisenstein saw that each film cell helped the film maker use narrative to influence how people understand the connections and meaning of the world around them. It is no surprise that film became a key tool for state propagandists.

During the last century moving images were the medium through which our great collective stories were channelled – famine, war, natural disasters, the struggle for racial equality. The fact that something was 'on TV' was a signifier of its importance by default. Families and communities gathered around televisions to witness great shared moments of human achievement, failure and horror.

The conditioning and selection of moving images became crucial to cementing a narrative about events in the public consciousness. In the first Iraq War videos of precision allied 'SMART' bombing were shown to propagate the notion of a cleaner,

targeted assault. After the 1989 revolution in Romania the army released the video of Ceaușescu's execution to the world's media to prove to the Romanian public that his rule was over.

The recent renaissance in cinema documentaries is the next chapter in this long history of attempting to influence public attitudes through moving images. The success of Michael Moore (*Bowling for Columbine*), Al Gore (*An Inconvenient Truth*), Morgan Spurlock (*Supersize Me*) and Hubert Sauber (*Darwin's Nightmare*) prove that the public's appetite to be influenced by film remains undimmed. Such documentaries are able to shape public opinion to an extent that most politicians in liberal democracies can only dream of.

Young people are now viewing this material in a range of different places – they have more opportunities to see, and more reasons to value, footage produced by their peers. In the UK young people aged 16 to 24 watched nearly an hour less TV each week in 2007 than they did in 2002 (down from 18.8 hours to 17.6 hours a week).¹⁸

Meanwhile, Google estimates that 13 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute. There is a maturing appreciation of the *value* of user-generated content, too. Ofcom, again in the UK, found that over half (53 per cent) of all people claim to value user-generated content as highly as they do professionally produced material. Among 16–34 year olds, 13 per cent actually rate user-generated content more highly, although this figure falls to 7 per cent among 35–54 year olds and to just 2 per cent of the over-65s.¹⁹

The power to influence people with video is being opened up to more people. By placing the power of the moving image into the hands of millions of people, the Video Republic is changing who has access to the realm of cultural influence. This is important because it changes how video and the ideas it conveys become a *public matter*. To shed more light on this cultural shift, we will look in more detail at four different stories of audiovisual content; examples taken from around the world. Prior to the falling cost of digital technology and access to broadband their production and distribution would not have been possible.

Visibility of minority groups: 'Ik Ben Nanda'²⁰

'Ik Ben Nanda' is a one-minute video that won the 'Special Mention Award' at the StrangerFestival. In this simply produced film Nanda, who has Down's syndrome, describes herself: 'My eyes are closer together, my arms and legs are shorter, I have one chromosome more. I am a Human Being, I am Nanda.' Wherever her video appears on the internet it attracts vast numbers of comments. It has now been screened on Dutch national television and has been seen by at least 1.2 million people. The video illustrates the scope for video to allow us to see lives that have previously been hidden. Film such as Nanda's can be found all over the Video Republic; a better known example is Alex Olinkiewicz's video 'In My Mind', which features him discussing his life as a teenager living with Asperger syndrome.²¹

From party political broadcast to 'political broadcast party'

In 2007 a video appeared online called 'Vote Different',²² mimicking Apple's 1984 Superbowl advert.²³ It showed Hillary Clinton delivering a typical party broadcast to a silent crowd. A hammer throwing athlete then smashes the screen, unleashing a beam of light. The message is clear: someone (Barack Obama) is coming to change politics. At the time of writing it had been viewed over 5 million times. Despite being an explicitly partisan piece of political communication, no official campaign team claimed credit. An individual called Phil de Vellis admitted responsibility shortly after its release, on the blog Huffington Post.²⁴ Despite a distant connection to a firm with links to the Obama campaign, de Vellis claims no official affiliation. The 2008 presidential election is one of the first to be fought on YouTube as much as in the mainstream media. In this forum, individuals such as Phil de Vellis can be just as influential as official campaign teams.

Exposing corruption: the Targuit Sniper²⁵

In November 2007 a young man hid on a hill in Morocco's northern cannabis growing region and filmed traffic police taking bribes from van drivers. 'The Targuit Sniper' has become a hero

to a nation of people angry about having to pay back-handers to civil servants and public officials. Many videos have now appeared on the internet showing other public officials taking bribes. In a country where the media is tightly controlled and vested interests profit from this repression, the Video Republic is an outlet for Moroccans to protest. This attracts the attention of international human rights organisations and the global media.

Spreading new ideas: the machine is using us²⁶

This four-minute animation tells the story of the growth of the internet, focusing on the connections it creates between different people. It was produced by Michael Wesch, a professor of cultural anthropology at Kansas State University. Since its launch in January 2007 it has tapped into the zeitgeist, and has influenced the way millions of people think about the internet. Using a deceptively simple combination of words and music, Wesch used the power of the Video Republic to spread an ‘academic idea’ which otherwise might have been published in a journal and read by a handful of people. At the time of writing it had been viewed over seven million times. This clip also breaks the mold of many internet videos: instead of instructing people to act or think a certain way, it prompts the viewer to question the received wisdom and think independently.

The Video Republic opportunity

They tell me, let's put this on YouTube and make it a hit. I say – let me know when you work out how...

Film maker, interview for Video Republic research,
Amsterdam 2008

The revolution will not be televised. It will be YouTubed.

Jeff Jarvis,²⁷ journalist and commentator on new media

The Video Republic promises a redistribution of power, it is unsettling the ‘ecosystem of influence’ in the digital age. It is

not one in which the BBC, CNN or Universal have disappeared, but it is a context in which these institutions are finding that they no longer have it all their own way. For a formal democratic system yearning for legitimacy, this creates new ways of connecting to people's everyday lives. For those trying to solve seemingly intractable social problems through influencing people's behaviour, it is also an opportunity to access a new space for debate. For those interested in increasing access to culture, it is a world of nearly cost-free distribution.

But if we are to capitalise on these opportunities, we will need to gain a more nuanced understanding of the Video Republic's relationship to the mainstream and the place of young people within it. Despite the fact that young people are using video to make themselves visible on an unprecedented scale (and giving away personal information continuously) we know surprisingly little about them as a cohort. We understand even less about what their use of these visual tools could mean. To gain a clearer sense of the implications, we need to turn to the roles young people are taking on in the Video Republic.

2 The route-around kids

In March 2007 a Turkish court order took the radical step of banning YouTube. It followed the outbreak of another online video ‘war’ between Greek and Turkish users of the site. Controversial clips were posted which appeared to insult the founding father of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Drawing on the newspaper reports we thought we could see the outline of a straightforward narrative. In a country where nearly half of the population is under 25 years of age²⁸ and there are numerous laws stifling the freedom of the press, surely here was a clash of generations, and of values. With the explosion in the Turkish youth population acting as a catalyst, new media seemed to be sustaining opposition to oppressive rules limiting freedom of expression.²⁹

Several months later, talking to some young Turkish video makers we quickly realised we had our story all wrong. In fact, earnest questions on the YouTube ban were met with some amusement:

What do I think? I'm laughing at it! It's easy enough to go around the ban.

Boy, Istanbul

In this case, it seemed that changing your IP address to access the site was preferable to picking a fight with the government. And yet Turkish youth don’t lack reasons to take to the streets. Social inequities abound (the richest 20 per cent of families receive over 50 per cent of the income, while the average man’s income is five times that of a woman’s),³⁰ and every young person we interviewed told of stark educational disparities and high youth unemployment.³¹ The environment is heavily politicised. Despite this the young people we met were weary of political upheaval and dismissive of corrupt politicians:

We are bored of the politicians. The young generation don't do anything, they don't go to meetings and things...

Girl, Istanbul

It's not for me. It's something which should be interesting but they know how it will end.

Boy, Istanbul

Combined with low levels of youth participation – 75 per cent of Turkish youth are not a member of any institution or organisation³² – it would seem that the next generation has little interest in taking on the establishment. If politics is a story, it's an uninspiring one and they 'know how it will end'. We met one Turkish youth worker who described the attitude in this way:

When it comes to the old politics they are not protesting. Just like with the YouTube ban – where you just circumvent problems like that.

Expert interview, Istanbul

This is played out in the type of Turkish films being produced; a teacher in a film academy described how aspiring Turkish film makers 'are not focusing much on the political, more the personal. They have their own tales to tell.' For the young people we met elsewhere in Europe, the philosophy we encountered in Turkey also made a lot of sense. Why get angry with established institutions and ways of doing things when you have the space online to build an alternative?

In this chapter we look at how the Video Republic is providing a space for young people to create an alternative set of youth cultures and adopt new roles. These young people are the 'route-around kids'. Simultaneously turned off by representative politics and drawn into the expressive possibility of places like the Video Republic, the route-around kids have found new freedoms to express themselves and connect with others. They have built an alternative world of communication and connection, rather than mounting a direct attack on the channels we have already. They are playing with new roles as

reporters, distributors, commentators and artists, drawing and appropriating the styles of those professions to make them their own.

This represents a liberation of sorts for young people. But as it becomes harder to tell one single narrative of youth in Europe, they are required to tell their own story about who they are as individuals. The rise of digital technologies has ensured that this process is being played out in public as never before. We will conclude by asking how this emphasis on a ‘do-it-yourself’ identity is starting to present this generation with a new set of challenges.

Who are the young people of Europe?

There is no single story of the youth of Europe. In fact, it is the profound differences between young people across Europe – both within and between countries – which perhaps most defines this generation. For example, there are stark disparities in poverty, educational access and health.³³

But it also worthwhile to note some shared characteristics. The pressures of an ageing population mean that in many of the places we visited, young people were on the brink of becoming an endangered species:

- *The Institute for Family Policies in Spain estimates that the under-14 population in the EU25 has decreased from 94 million in 1980 to only 74 million in 2007.³⁴*

Globalisation continues to shape the lives of young people in Europe:

- *In a knowledge-based economy, jobs are transferable and less secure.³⁵*
- *Europe is subject to vast movements of people. The EU's third annual report on migration and integration found that 'net migration, ranging between 0.5 and 1 million per year for most of the 1990s, has increased to levels ranging between 1.5 and 2 million since 2002'.³⁶*

- *Globalisation continues to remain both an opportunity and a threat. According to the EU, without renewed effort, ‘the forces of global competition, the impact of new technologies and our ageing population will increase the gap between the two Europes, and between Europe and the world’.³⁷*

Young people living in Europe are increasingly financially dependent on their parents:

- *Young people are living at home for longer, with most citing financial constraints as the reason for not moving out.³⁸*
- *Predictions suggest this generation will be worse off than their parents. A survey by Gallop for the World Economic Forum in 2006 found that in Western Europe only 18 per cent feel the world will be more prosperous for the next generation. More than half (53 per cent) think it will be less so.³⁹*

Young people have an ambivalent attitude towards Europe:

- *Research for the European Union found young people were increasingly likely to include ‘Europeanness’ as part of their description of their identity.⁴⁰*
- *Yet it is more difficult to define positively exactly what Europeanness is. There was no simple ‘European’ identity which young people ascribed to.⁴¹*

Ignoring politics

I don’t think politicians are good at listening to young people. They are always in the building, in a box apart from the city and it’s hard to get in. A politician came to visit us at school but it wasn’t so much us talking. More it was her talking.

Girl, Helsinki⁴²

Politics and government remain at best an abstraction, and young people’s lack of interest in politics is merely a rational response to their own powerlessness. Why should they bother to learn about something when they

*have no power to influence it, and when it makes no effort to address itself to them?*⁴³

David Buckingham, Institute of Education, London

Look out of the window of Kiasma, a sleek museum for contemporary art in the centre of Helsinki, and you can make out the square outline of the boxy Parliament building opposite. While visiting Helsinki in a snowy February, we found young people inside one of the museum's work spaces developing their storyboards at an over-subscribed video-making workshop. We spent the week talking to them about their perspective on Finland. We soon realised that as far as they were concerned, even though parliament is only a stone's throw from Kiasma, the two buildings couldn't be more remote from each other.

On most indicators Finland can boast of a fairly healthy democracy.⁴⁴ Levels of corruption are low and many of the young people we met spoke warmly of the popularity of their current president. Meanwhile, the mass media are certainly not in terminal decline – in terms of newspaper reading, Finland ranks first in the EU and third in the world, after Japan and Norway, with 532 copies of newspapers sold per 1,000 inhabitants in 2003.⁴⁵ And yet the young Finns we met lacked faith in the ability of their leaders to solve the sprawling international problems (such as climate change and financial uncertainties) which characterise our age.

Of course this scepticism is not confined to Finland. In *The Everyday Democracy Index*, Paul Skidmore and Kirsten Bound argue that:

*European democracies young and old are beset by a malaise that they cannot shake off. This malaise manifests itself differently in different places, but it is pervasive, and persistent. In 'old Europe' – the western European countries that were members of the EU before 2004 – it is marked by the gradual erosion of the cultural and institutional bases of representative democracy; in the central and eastern European accession countries of 'new' Europe, by the failure to consolidate these bases now that the democratic euphoria of the early 1990s has subsided.*⁴⁶

Looking at evidence from 27 European countries since 1978, the authors find that on average voter turnout has fallen by more than 2.5 per cent per election. From 1980 to 2000 party membership in the established democracies of Western Europe almost halved. Accompanying these trends is a profound decline in our levels of trust towards elected officials. In Britain public trust in the government has fallen on average by about 0.8 per cent every year since the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁷ In the European elections of 2004 voter turnout dropped to 45 per cent.⁴⁸

A now familiar footnote to this tale of political disillusionment is the story of an apathetic younger generation no longer inspired by politics. While these trends are distributed across more than one age group, the generation of Europeans born in the 1980s have the dubious honour of being one of the most disengaged from formal politics in recent history.

Political attitude

I like this young generation, they are creative and artistic. They like to express themselves on the streets; they can express themselves with their clothes and be what they want to be. They can be themselves and they have the courage to be themselves. They will be interesting when they grow up, to see how they run the world. Maybe they will change some things.

Girl, Helsinki⁴⁹

This indifference to political leaders and formal politics is reflected in the Video Republic. View counters betray a very naked truth – young people are not flocking to listen to their presidents and prime ministers when they talk to them via internet videos. In the UK, in April 2007 charlieissocoollike, a 16-year-old vlogger from Bath, joined YouTube. So did the British Prime Minister. Since then Charlie has amassed 70,000 subscribers. The Prime Minister has 5,000. Meanwhile, only a minority of young people appear to be making videos that express clear political aspirations, or aim to change how their countries are governed.

We should be wary of conflating this disillusionment with mainstream politics and the mistrust of political organisations with a disinterest in projecting political opinions and attitudes. Time and again across Europe we found young people with strong opinions about their countries and how they wanted their future to be – *political* opinions. Unicef research into 27 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States since 1992 found that young people aged between 15 and 24 ‘are interested in the social and political life of their countries but are critical of the work of the new democratic institutions’.⁵⁰

Dr Stephen Coleman, in his research for the Carnegie UK Trust Young People Initiative, found that ‘young people’s thoughts about power and its effects are an integral and routine part of their culture’.⁵¹ He goes on to argue that ‘it is not young people that are disconnected from formal politics, but political institutions that are disconnected from young people. Young people are more interested in new forms of participation – demonstrations, signing petitions and boycotting products.’⁵² They are also more likely to engage in symbolic and cultural forms of protest, which are often ephemeral and harder to pin down.

These types of activity may be more comparable to patterns of participation in popular culture and entertainment. Henry Jenkins, a writer on new technologies, describes today’s subcultures as voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations:

*[B]ecause they are voluntary, people do not remain in communities that no longer meet their emotional or intellectual needs. Because they are temporary, these communities form and disband with relative flexibility. Because they are tactical, they tend not to last beyond the tasks that set them in motion. Insofar as being a fan is a lifestyle, fans may shift between one series and another many times in the history of their affiliations.*⁵³

The analysis of online communities and participation offered by thinkers such as Jenkins illustrates how inadequate the term ‘apathetic’ is to describe the attitude of an entire generation. A disinclination to vote can be quite different

from disinterest in politics, and that means we need to look more closely to identify the new spaces where politics is taking place.

Mass media to multimedia

In 1968 the discord between young and old exploded publicly in direct confrontation on the streets. Fifty years later, we are unlikely to find evidence of young people's disillusionment with their governments on the streets, or even in the mainstream press. As they invest in individualised versions of youth culture, it grows harder to define young people by the newspaper they read or the political party they choose to join. If we need to look in alternative places for the politics of the route-around kids, where should we start?

Like the 'blogosphere' or social networking sites, the Video Republic represents a new public realm; and as people reconvene there the mainstream media is being forced to relinquish its monopoly over information and debate. Across Europe the idea of media as connecting societies, even building the nation, has long been influential. The activities of route-around kids pose a profound challenge to this vision, and a number of commentators have explored the far-reaching implications. However, it would be a mistake to assume that this generation is abandoning the old broadcast and print media institutions. It is more accurate to speak of the diversification of media, as multimedia supplant mass-media. This is shaping what Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham called the 'future of public connection'.⁵⁴

As we saw in Chapter 1, for young people in Europe the concept of television as the stage for shared national experiences is increasingly less meaningful. One survey of several European countries claimed that nearly half (48 per cent) of all 16–24-year-old internet users claimed their TV consumption has declined as a direct result of the internet. This survey found that 82 per cent of 16–24 year olds use the internet between five and seven days each week, while only 77 per cent watch TV as often (a decrease of 5 per cent since last year).⁵⁵

In most European countries there are only a handful of events which represent truly ‘national’ moments of collective viewing. In Finland it might be Independence Day. In the UK it might be the Christmas edition of the soap opera *Eastenders*. In Germany it could be *Lindenstrasse*. People are likely to rely on national broadcasters to relay these events for many years to come. However, young people are staking a claim to many of the activities that were once the preserve of journalists and broadcasters.

The route-around with video

Film making is easy now. You used to need a huge production company. Now you can just pick up a cheap camera, chop it up and put it up. And you'll get feedback from people all over the world overnight... That's one of the main things that has given me the kick. It's so simple to get things done... People want to be respected and listened to. But it might be hard for them to stand up and talk. You have to be that way inclined. But you can let a video, or the programme, or the film, do the talking for you. It's a way of getting your voice heard.

Young film maker from The Bridge,⁵⁶ London⁵⁷

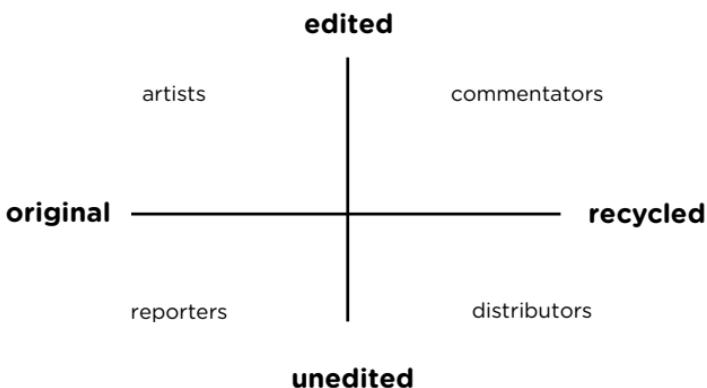
The Video Republic is handing young people the tools to create their own culture, which gives them new types of power. They are acting as:

- route-around distributors
- route-around reporters
- route-around artists
- route-around commentators

Route-around distributors

The most basic act in the Video Republic – taking a clip of prerecorded footage and uploading it to a video-sharing website – places young people in the position of distributors of visual imagery. They select content as important and draw other people’s attention to it. This fits in the bottom right of the matrix in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Roles in the video republic



Route-around reporters

Recording concerts, social events and activities gives young people the ability to document events and share them with other people – often far more quickly than the mainstream can. This kind of activity fits in the bottom left of the matrix in Figure 2.

Route-around artists

The Video Republic has given young people greater space to make, exhibit and share films and music videos with one another, extending the creative activities that young people have always undertaken. This content usually fits in the top half of the matrix in Figure 2, with young people editing either their own content or reworking others to make a creative statement.

Route-around commentators

Taking content from other places and combining it in new ways to create a new meaning gives young people the power to assert their opinion and perspective. This also fits into the top half of the matrix (Figure 2). The mash-up and vlogging phenomena outlined in Chapter 1 is driven by this urge – to pass comment on an idea, news story, or incidents from everyday life.

As young people adopt these different roles they permit an audiovisual public realm – the Video Republic – to come into being. But can we really consider these activities to be political acts? Zygmunt Bauman argues that ‘politics is the activity charged with the task of translating private problems into public issues (and vice versa)’.⁵⁸ Now young people are less likely to leave this process of ‘translation’ to others, preferring to do it themselves; expressing yourself in these public spaces is a *political act*, albeit with a small ‘p’. What might have once been written off as mere entertainment, or mere culture, is undoubtedly part of how people engage with the public realm. It is through processes such as this that young people are translating their private thoughts and ideas into ‘public matter’.

DIY identity

I realised I am not western at all, I am not eastern at all. I am something in between, a mixture. I'm a foreigner in Asia, I'm a foreigner in Europe. I'm at home here. I have my own values.

Film maker, Istanbul⁵⁹

The emergence of the Video Republic has given us a perspective on young people never seen before. Digital technologies ensure that their conversations, their favourite films and music are now prominently displayed in public. But in individualised societies it is harder than ever to gain a clear sense of who they are collectively. The call to ‘be yourself’ has been a rallying cry of wave after wave of youth movements. It occupies an even more central position in the youth cultures generated by the route-around kids; but as the stable reference points of nationality, class, ethnicity and religion decline in influence, ‘identity’ becomes a vexed question. Young people find themselves continuously asked to give a coherent answer to the question: ‘who are you and where do you come from?’ As Anna Bagnoli observes:

The experience of being a foreigner, or in Simmel's words a 'Stranger', is not anymore a prerogative of travellers and migrants alone, but can easily be

*lived by anyone: in the world of late modernity the existential condition of the foreigner, which is typically characterised by rapid social change, can be taken to represent the human condition as a whole.*⁶⁰

In this climate we need to look to young people to tell their own story about who they are: ‘I am whatever I say I am.’ In *FYI: The new politics of personal information* Peter Bradwell and Niamh Gallagher argue: ‘The burden of identification has been pushed towards the individual, and the tools we use to stake out our social status are predicated on our being seen. Personal information is increasingly the raw material through which this happens.’⁶¹

For the route-around kids, the Video Republic (and other digital public spaces colonised by young people) have created a new theatre in which the process of identity formation can be played out publicly. The concept of a ‘do it yourself identity’ is a lived experienced for many of the young people we met; whether they grew up in Istanbul or Helsinki. Many derive a stronger sense of self through playing some of the roles described above; this cultural participation helps them to define their relationship to the world.

The ability to act as reporters, distributors, artist and commentators allows some young people to assume positions of power in the Video Republic. Their voices, ideas and emotions can travel further and are more likely to influence others – as citizens they have an ‘inflated existence’. In the next chapter we will explore how a lack of skills and resources prevents some people from participating to the same extent. To address these inequalities, we will also need to untangle complex issues of regulation and governance.

3 Reading, writing and representing

Napoleon, 46, is a relentlessly anecdotal film director. He wears a zip-up hoodie drawn over his head. Each question you ask him is another dime in his jukebox of stories – the time he met Antony Minghella, why his parents called him Napoleon, the day he was arrested during the revolution in 1989. Right now, we're communing with him on Orthodox Easter Sunday at the end of a refectory table in the Catholic orphanage in Iasi (pronounced 'Yash') – Romania's second biggest city. Napoleon worries about Romania – the country he loves 'is like a child'. Most of the children here are aged between 14 and 20 and have grown up surrounded by the cynicism of post-communist Romania. Napoleon says that the young people at the video workshop we're visiting don't know their own potential – nor do they have any idea of the kind of country they want to live in.

On Saturday he held court in the same room for the whole day. Each of the 20 children in the workshop took turns to sit with him and discuss their ideas for their one-minute films. The arc of these exchanges was almost always the same. What would begin as disconnected, Napoleon would make practical. He encourages the children to talk from their personal experience. 'You can make a fiction,' he stares at us, moving his head out from beneath the hood, 'but you have to know something about that fiction.' And the truth of these children's lives may be uncomfortable. Half of them have no parents, only a few have two.

The following day Rodica, a psychologist who has organised the workshops, explains to us that she began using video because it was the only way she could get through to the heroin addicts she used to rehabilitate. She says that Napoleon's workshop will be the first time that these children have been able to express something of themselves to other people.

Even though the children may be poor, they are not isolated from the world. They all have pages on Hi5 (a social networking site popular in Romania), and they watch clips of American comedy shows on YouTube. They all know about other European cities and have clear ideas about which ones they would like to visit most (London just beat Moscow with Barcelona in third place). Like the other young people across Europe who are taking part in the workshops, they place little trust in politicians and their governments to change their lives. They believe, often for good reason, that most of them are corrupt.

The workshops are explained in simple terms to the children and young people – Napoleon says that they are about ‘being happy’ and ‘being seen’. But it is Napoleon’s ‘dream’ that the films will be screened on prime time Romanian TV; according to him, ‘people don’t remember names, they remember stories’. Stories equal power, and short films are a very effective way of telling stories. In all the different countries that these workshops have taken place, Napoleon’s formula works, regardless of the background of the young people.

Here comes everybody?

The video-making workshops in Romania underscore a very significant point – you need to make heavy investment to extract value from the Video Republic. Although it may be *technically* easier than before, ‘making a film’ is still not as simple as pressing a button – you don’t need to spend too long studying user-generated content to be convinced of this. Just as traditional forms of literacy are unequally distributed, it is also the case that some young people in Europe are less able to express themselves with moving images. The route-around kids have helped to change the basis on which young people exist in communities and groups. They exist as people you can meet in person, but they also exist as an impression, assembled through different forms of digital content, which can be transferred to other people online. For all the talk of ‘here comes everybody’,⁶² ‘we think’⁶³ and ‘mass creativity’, the ability to construct this digital identity is by no means evenly spread across Europe.

This chapter will explore key factors affecting people's ability to be part of the Video Republic: *access* (being able to make and share video) and *governance* (the ill-defined 'rules of the game' in the Video Republic). Despite the democratising promise of this brave new world, the influence and status of the young people can also be constrained by these two questions. As we reconvene in this alternative digital sphere, these issues will have far-reaching implications for young people. We conclude by asking whether their ability to express themselves digitally could become a core skill – reading, writing and representing.

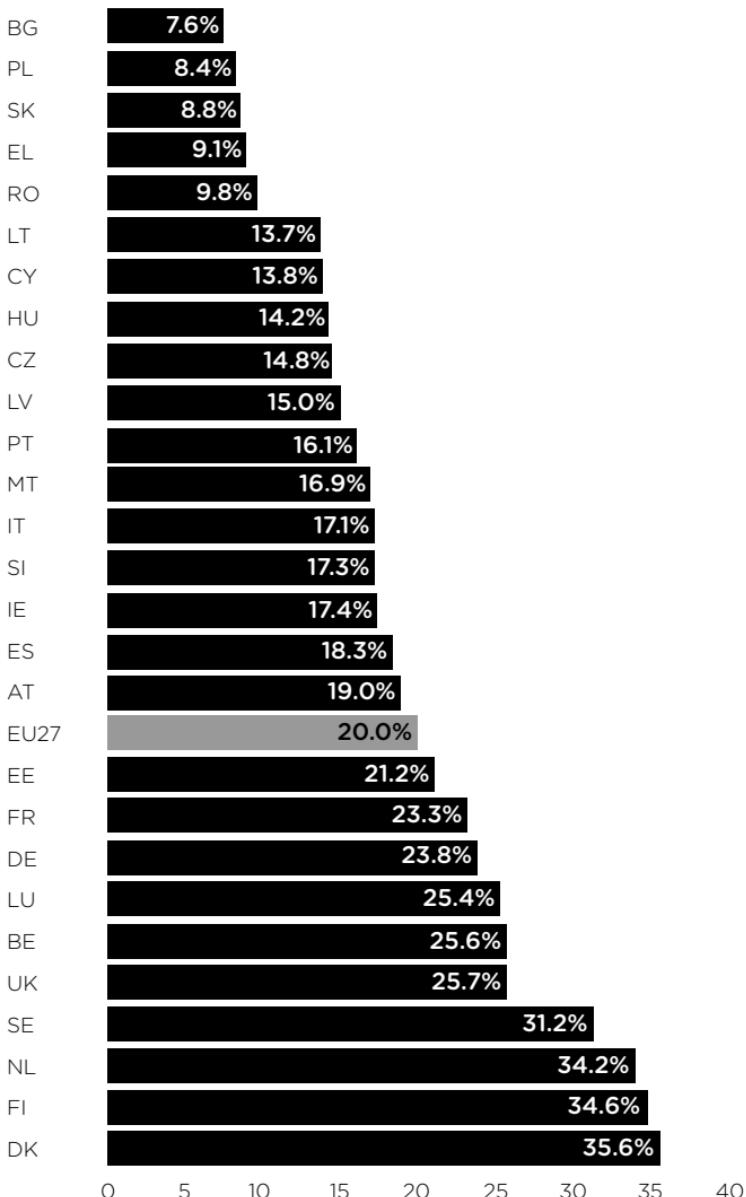
Access

To be a part of the Video Republic you need to be able to make, share and produce video. This is contingent on an ability to negotiate a series of 'barriers to entry'.

Making the video: barriers to entry

A large part of this report has been concerned with the collapsing costs of video making and the availability of internet access. However, we should be wary of overstating the ubiquity of either – we write with a Western European bias and the story varies hugely between countries, regions and social groups. Some of the young people we spoke to had never made a video before; this was the first opportunity they had ever had to participate in a workshop like the one run by the Stranger project. Others (in inner city London, for example) had been subjected to a barrage of arts initiatives, media production courses and social inclusion projects. To get a better sense of the technological barriers, looking at a snapshot of broadband access offers is a good starting point. To some extent, it follows a predictable pattern (see Figure 3). Worryingly, the same report also highlights the *growing* disparity in access, noting that 'the gap between Member States with the highest and lowest penetration increased from 27.4 percentage points in January 2007 to 28.0 in January 2008'.⁶⁴

Figure 3 EU broadband penetration rate in January 2008

Source: Commission of the European Communities⁶⁵

Even when individuals surmount technological barriers, such as poor levels of internet access, they face a range of other challenges. The process of video making requires a range of skills and cultural capital. This takes us into a much broader ‘digital inclusion’ debate. Those who are socially excluded are more likely to suffer a lack of access and poorer online skills than others.⁶⁶ Research has shown that far from being the answer in itself to inequalities, there is a risk that technology exacerbates them.⁶⁷ Consequently, the digital inclusion debate has moved on from ‘a concern with material access to the technology to the trickier question of social and cultural factors that influence use’.⁶⁸

As Napoleon’s support of the young people in Romania demonstrates, an equally crucial piece of the jigsaw is giving people the confidence to make film, along with the ability to anticipate how others might read and evaluate it.⁶⁹ There is a good reason why the majority of successful vloggers are middle class, white, articulate and good looking. They share a sense of confidence when it comes to expressing themselves in the offline world, and this will translate neatly to the online world. Knowing how to use technology to tell a story about your experiences is extremely difficult to define, let alone to teach. Nevertheless, skills such as this will be of greater significance as young people are called upon to ‘broadcast themselves’ in places like the Video Republic.

New literacies

Over the past century the schooling system in Europe has been orientated towards developing classical ‘literacy skills’ and other forms of literacy have been confined to the realm of informal learning. It is now widely accepted that unless formal education institutions intervene in this ‘informal’ sphere, new social inequities will emerge. Media literacy strategies and initiatives now abound across the continent. According to one recent study on media literacy (funded by the European Commission) the concept: ‘includes the command of previous forms of literacy: reading and writing, audiovisual, digital and the new skills

required in a climate of media convergence'.⁷⁰ It goes on to identify a number of trends in media literacy around Europe:

- media convergence: new research, new experiences
- shift from focus on protection to focus on promotion
- growing sensitivity of citizens to commercial communication
- increasing presence of media literacy in the compulsory education curriculum
- schools media (a rise in educational media aimed at schools)
- media industry more attentive to media literacy
- new active participation by stakeholders (European institutions, regulatory authorities, civil society, media industry)
- involvement of authorities in regulation

This list aptly illustrates the range of institutions with overlapping responsibility for this hybrid idea 'media literacy'. Many have little influence over what happens in places like the Video Republic; others have a disproportionate influence over it. In some cases it is almost impossible to define their relationship with it. But until we are able to map the competing interests of this digital public sphere, we will be poorly equipped to help young people navigate it.

Governance

While we might prefer to think of online video as a type of democratically assembled 'commons', in reality the Video Republic has sparked an extraordinary collision of private interests. While some corporations are haemorrhaging profits as individuals share and produce content for free, others are busily establishing extraordinary monopolies over content and information. Given that a great deal of the excitement about this new 'public' space has been generated by the absence of traditional sources of authority, there has been a certain reluctance to encourage regulation. Indeed, from the outside it might seem that little is required – to many the Video Republic is self-regulating. The logic of this approach requires closer examination. In their quest for dominion over this scrappy,

unpredictable space, there are a range of actors who could easily compromise the principles of a democratic cultural realm.

In this respect, the challenges of an ‘online’ public forum mirror the difficulties faced in regulating public spaces in cities. Who determines the ground rules for use? Who regulates the norms, boundaries and limits? Who decides who gets to take part, and on what terms? The battle lines in the Video Republic are being drawn, and they extend outwards into questions of copyright, privacy, freedom of speech and monopolies of influence.

Copyright and intellectual property

Some entities, rather than taking the lawful path of building businesses that respect intellectual property rights on the Internet, have sought their fortunes by brazenly exploiting the infringing potential of digital technology.

Complaint filed by Viacom against YouTube⁷¹

At the time of writing, Viacom is in the process of suing Google for \$1bn, alleging massive and intentional copyright infringement on the video-sharing website YouTube. To Viacom, YouTube ‘threatens not just plaintiffs but the economic underpinnings of one of the most important sectors of the US economy’.⁷² Such disputes are symptomatic of the conflict raging between the creative industries, and a proliferation of new distribution channels. And it isn’t just companies entering into legal battles with each other; in October 2007, Jammie Thomas was fined \$222,000 following a court case brought by the Recording Industry Association of America.⁷³ She was guilty of making available 24 songs for others to download.⁷⁴ In France, proposed legislation (the ‘three strike’ rule) will see infringing users struck off the internet by their internet service providers (ISPs) if they are caught file-sharing three times.⁷⁵

Michelle Malkin is a conservative blogger in the USA. She recorded a vlog criticising music star Akon, using clips of one of his live performances as part of a personal critique.⁷⁶ Google had the content removed for breaching the copyright of his record label (ISPs and video-hosting services have no incentive to

protect the individual in this scenario). In the next twist to the tale, the video was promptly put back up following a response, with help from digital rights advocates Electronic Frontier Foundation.⁷⁷ These examples illustrate the uncertainty created by the emergence of the Video Republic – this is uncharted legal territory for everyone. While corporations can do little to curb the practices of millions of users, particular individuals make a vulnerable target when questions of ownership are in flux. The problem is, these ‘criminals’ are often young people and they don’t think they’re doing anything wrong.

Music, television and film companies no longer hold a monopoly on the way content moves between people. Currently, the way governments, business and the legal system are responding is deeply confused. They too easily equate the economic interests of rights holders with the interests of creators – the video makers, artists and musicians – rather than with the health of the cultural realm. Many film and music companies would prefer to frame the argument in terms of theft and piracy, when the reality is much more multifaceted. While video should not become free of economic value, it should be freely used as currency in cultural exchange and creation. Concerns about economic value can easily undermine the promise of cultural exchange in places such as the Video Republic.

‘Content’ is not just an economic asset. Content is culture. It is the currency through which we build a sense of who we are. There is a democratic imperative to give people the ability to contest, remake and critique it. A society that claims to value free speech and a vibrant, grassroots cultural life has an important tension to manage. It means making some difficult and groundbreaking choices, but as Lawrence Lessig observes, there can be some guiding principles: ‘We start with the principle of free speech, not the values of the proprietary network. We start with the principle and see what’s possible.’⁷⁸

Networks and gatekeepers

As we saw in the first chapter, a video is organised not by content or creator, but by its relationship to other videos. The

importance of this process is exaggerated when the amount of information and number of videos is so overwhelming. In this respect the Republic imitates the offline world: it's not what you know, it's *who* you know.

At the StrangerFestival we got talking to one young vlogger about his loyal fan base. How was it that his day-to-day thoughts and reflections have won him thousands and thousands of subscribers? He explained that while it was down to his own charm and wit that he had managed to retain so much interest, a lot of early success was due to being a good friend of one of the most widely known vloggers in the UK. He'd simply pointed them in his direction, with links and references in his own videos. To some, this might be the online equivalent of being friends with the most popular boy in school – you're bound to get some attention too. But it also tells us something revealing about this supposedly 'flat' world of online video.

Despite the apparent openness of the Video Republic, some people are still more likely to be 'listened to' than others, because of the influence of established reputation or new trends and ideas. (Or success can be linked to less complex factors: one expert interviewee declared that, to be successful, an online video needed to be 'either funny or filthy'.) Some individuals act as connectors linking communities together. As Helen McCarthy, Paul Miller and Paul Skidmore argue:

[P]ower is as crucial as ever in structuring the contours of the network society. But power no longer resides in individual institutions... but in what Castells calls the 'switchers' through which networks regulate terms of entry and privilege or exclude particular interests or positions. These structural conditions help to explain the persistence of particular kinds of systematic disadvantage even where the wider environment appears to be in flux.⁷⁹

To some extent, this is inevitable. Clay Shirky has argued that power law distributions⁸⁰ are present in any situation characterised by an aggregation of large numbers of free choices.⁸¹ It is not unfair in itself; however, the 'switchers' (whether individuals or corporations) must be open to challenge too. This is particularly the case when – as in the case of vloggers

– people become taste makers because of their perceived independence, building relationships with viewers that are based on trust. Some commentators have highlighted the potential for the more successful vloggers to use their huge subscriber base as a channel of discreet marketing, while others have drawn attention to the virtually unlimited advertising potential of online video:

YouTube capitalizes on the growing proclivity of internet users to be creators of information as well as consumers. And as the network television and cable audiences age, advertisers are increasingly aware that ‘user-created content’... are key to attracting young audiences. But as the Goo-Tube model develops, behind each video will be a powerful connection to an ad, targeted to the user’s online behavior, as well as the stealth collection of personal data.⁸²

Google, once seen as the friendly giant of the web, now controls a vast array of these ‘networks of influence’. It is perhaps the biggest player in the Video Republic, and not simply because of its ownership of YouTube. As search engines have become the primary means through which to gather information and make connections they have started to wield extraordinary power over our lives. Companies such as Google are the unofficial gatekeepers of the Video Republic, and often we simply ‘hope’ that they’ll use this power wisely. For many, trust is already being eroded. As the web 2.0 sceptic Andrew Keen puts it:

*They have amassed more information about people in 10 years than all the governments of the world put together. They make the Stasi and the KGB look like the innocent old granny next door. This is of immense significance. If someone evil took them over, they could easily become Big Brother.*⁸³

Although in the offline world governments determine the limits of free speech, it is often private companies (with some help from their users) who are called on to regulate the darker side of the Video Republic. This is an extremely challenging and often uncomfortable position for them to occupy. On 7 November 2007 Pekka Eric Auvinen, an 18-year-old Finn, shot eight people in his school before turning the gun on himself.⁸⁴

Prior to committing the atrocity Auvinen uploaded a video to YouTube explaining his motives. A video uploaded five days prior to the shootings titled ‘Just Testing My Gun’ had been viewed 50,000 times before the shootings. We may be wary of hosting services, search engines and ISPs limiting our freedom of expression, but incidents such as this indicate that they may have an increasingly important part to play in keeping us safe.

The route-around kids are at the centre of these ongoing tussles over governance and regulation. They may be plotting their route around existing political and cultural institutions, but they are also plunging headlong into an uncertain set of relationships with new ones.

The ‘digital body’ and privacy

As we saw in Chapter 2, the route-around kids who can negotiate the barriers to entry and find a platform in the Video Republic can enjoy significant influence and even power. But participating in these digital spaces adds an extra layer of complexity and risk to the process of identity formation. It means that for the route-around kids, the old public places where self-definition took place (school, the home, social clubs) are only part of the story. The American thinker Danah Boyd talks about the MySpace profile as a way of ‘writing yourself into being’ in front of alternative publics. She goes on to argue that the way we learn to interpret the reactions of others and adjust our behaviours in the offline world is mirrored by a comparable process online:

While text, images, audio, and video all provide valuable means for developing a virtual presence, the act of articulation differs from how we convey meaningful information through our bodies. This process also makes explicit the self-reflexivity that Giddens argues is necessary for identity formation, but the choices individuals make in crafting a digital body highlight the self-monitoring that Foucault describes.⁸⁵

Previously our youthful experimentation with aspects of our identity would linger only either in the memories of peers, or in a few dusty photographs in drawers. Now it is imprinted onto

cached memory, sprawling into any corner of the internet, waiting discovery through a simple Google name search. We are just starting to wake up to the longevity of our digital footprint. It is now commonplace to observe that this generation has an alternative approach to questions of privacy. For them, it is a more elastic, nuanced idea: the lines between private and public information have been blurred. While they may be prepared to place vast amounts of detail about themselves online, the evidence suggests that once this information is out there, they'd also quite like to *take it back* too. Peter Bazalgette (who imported the reality television show *Big Brother* to the UK) commissioned some polling of the attitudes of 18–24 year olds towards privacy. He found that, paradoxically, they actually valued privacy more highly than freedom of expression. He argues:

*We have seen from Big Brother that they are often happy to expose their relationships, or indeed their flesh. But they have chosen to do this. My impression is that their idea of privacy is that it should be available when they want it... To be attracted by self-exposure at a relatively early age does not mean you have no future right. You should be able to change your mind.*⁸⁶

The Video Republic is characterised by openness and experimentation, and young people are particularly vulnerable to making ill-judged choices about what to put online. Whether or not they are able to change their mind later will depend partly on how the questions of governance, discussed in the early part of this chapter, are resolved.

Reading, writing and representing

Moving images enable us to tell stories about who we are rapidly and powerfully; young people will increasingly be expected to be fluent in this form of communication and identity play. In some ways, your ability to make the right decisions about what to put online (and to get recognised in a positive sense) is a form of social or cultural capital. Those who are most adept at manipulating these channels of communication, and at

representing themselves, will have advantages when it comes to getting jobs, socialising, and making themselves heard. Given that the skills to do these things are unequally distributed around Europe, there is a risk that the Video Republic could perpetuate pre-existing inequalities.

We have tried to show that who gets in to the Republic, and what they are allowed to do there, matters. In the next chapter we will look for ways to harness the excitement and promise of video to create a more ‘expressive’ democracy, where people can play a more active role in expressing themselves and influencing others.

4 A (more) expressive democracy

The former Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski recently declared that he was: ‘not an enthusiast of a young person sitting in front of a computer, watching video clips and pornography while sipping a bottle of beer and voting when he feels like it’.⁸⁷ From its earliest beginnings, the Video Republic was on an inevitable collision course with politics, and now Europe is littered with intriguing stories of the disruptive consequences. As a result politicians are anxious to take the reigns, recognising that whether they like it or not they need to adapt to survive.

In Germany the Chancellor Angela Merkel has been addressing the German public via her video podcast ‘Die Kanzlerin direkt’ since June 2006.⁸⁸ Germans who were frustrated by the lack of interactivity set up ‘Direkt zur Kanslerin’, enabling people to pose questions back to the Chancellor.⁸⁹ The European Union has its own YouTube channel,⁹⁰ boasting one of the most viewed internet videos ever published by a political organisation.⁹¹ In the UK a government concerned about the estrangement between generations has ploughed money into projects designed to get young people’s ‘voices heard’ through new media.⁹²

Politicians have always experimented with different media platforms to help them convey their message, but their forays into online video have generally only met with ridicule. Initiatives such as the UK’s ‘Ask the PM’ or ‘WebCameron’ are often greeted with accusations of tokenism and ‘spin’. Slip-ups and misdemeanors are unlikely to go unnoticed or unrecorded; it isn’t hard to find videos of the French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, drunk or losing his temper.

In this chapter we will argue that that these webcams, media initiatives, gaffes and glorified online party political broadcasts only skim the surface of a more significant story. The Video Republic is a part of a wider phenomenon: the collision of

digitally facilitated self-expression with traditional methods of governance. The key frontiers of political debate in many European countries – behaviour change, identity politics and ideas of citizenship – are intimately bound up with how we define ourselves and represent our opinions. Democracies must find new ways to accommodate our thirst for self-expression. If we draw on its logic the Video Republic can point us in the direction of a more ‘expressive democracy’.

Expressive democracy

The emergence of the Video Republic is part of a wider transition towards European societies, which are characterised by greater pluralities of expression. The long term rising levels of literacy, numeracy and educational standards have equipped citizens with sophisticated understandings of their own identities and the world around them.

The fact that people can represent *themselves* to a greater degree means that their relationship with democratically elected leaders is changing. Internet videos challenge democracy not because they provide the opportunity to satirise presidents and prime ministers; but because they have provided a more exciting rival space for free expression to take place. This deprives politics of the emotional connection needed to compel citizens to participate in (often impersonal) decision-making processes. And the idea of an expressive democracy suggests how it is possible to move beyond the ‘one-size-fits all’ processes of representative democracy.⁹³

This may seem counter-intuitive – why should politics concern itself with the Video Republic when so much of the content is decidedly apolitical? Messy, trivial and offensive much of the material may be – but the patterns of behaviour underpinning the emergence of this film making and video distribution have revolutionised our culture. Our democracies need to catch up. Next, we will describe how three key political debates in Europe provide starting points for an exchange between mainstream public debate and the Republic.

Being you – identity politics

In Amsterdam we met a young woman called Joey who told us about a video she had made as part of the Stranger project. It described her (rather anticlimactic) journey towards finding a father whom she had never known; Joey is black, but her family is white. She was emphatic that the process of making the video was not essential to her own understanding of her background, but it did represent a way to answer back to society's demand for a straightforward narrative of her identity:

All my life I had these questions, other people were asking me. They would prefer to put people in boxes. I wanted my video to be light – we were joking even though it was so complicated and mixed up.

Joey uses the video to tell her story in a way that parodies clichéd attitudes to nationality and family. We saw a similar approach in another film made by a young man from Turkey. His film explored Istanbul's mix of people and cultural background and perspectives through the diversity of food and drink in the city. Through music, imagery and colour these films tell stories of identity in nuanced, personal terms – accommodating a depth which many feel is sorely lacking from mainstream debates about these questions.

The impetus behind these personal videos is the same impetus behind slightly clumsier national debates about what it means to belong to a country and what it means to be European. These debates occasionally emerge in more explosive forms, such as the youth riots in Copenhagen in 2007 and those in France in 2005. They provoke uncertainty about who we are individually and what holds us together. Meanwhile, advances in data capture, information sharing and identification technologies also raise challenging questions about the self, liberties and the sanctity of our personal identities. The popular discourses surrounding the defunct European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty have also largely been about culture and identity rather than protocols.

The contrast between the freedom associated with explorations of individual identity in places like the Video Republic and the frustration associated with the stuttering political search for collective identities couldn't be starker. To

deepen and extend these political debates we need to enable people to tell their own stories of identity and belonging; experimentation with moving images suggests one route towards achieving this.

Being influenced – behaviour change

the way in which the government communicates policies with the public matters. If governments want to enlist communities in solving problems they need to be careful about the kind of implicit as well as explicit messages they send out. For example, campaigns about teenage drinking need to avoid sending the message that these choices are normal, because they are what everyone else is doing. Recycling campaigns need to give people information about what other people are doing, not just what the problem is and how they can contribute.

Duncan O'Leary, *The Politics of Public Behaviour*⁹⁴

From global warming to crime, obesity and personal debt – solving the problems faced by countries across Europe depends on influencing how we live and the way we behave. The frontiers of policy making are now as likely to incorporate ideas about how to shape the culture in which we live, as they are to deal with the mechanics of public service delivery. Governments compete for different ways to evoke ‘culture change’ to achieve collective outcomes. Books on behavioural economics are becoming required reading for up and coming politicians.⁹⁵

Henry Jenkins has described how difficult it is to be an ‘informed citizen’ in this climate – the best we can aspire to is occupying the role of ‘monitorial citizen’.⁹⁶ Bombarded by conflicting versions of the truth, people understandably now expect to be presented with a compelling, persuasive case before they consider changing their behaviour. The Video Republic provides a space where decisions can be informed, and behaviour can be changed, undermining the role of mass-media and governments as the sole suppliers of information. This plurality is exciting, and it extends the marketplace for new ideas and

alternative debate. Why join a political party or endorse someone else's opinion when you could become your campaigner for your *own* views?

But we will also be required to confront the darker side of the influence of the Video Republic, as user-generated content is increasingly used to manipulate vulnerable individuals and disseminate offensive ideas and images. Violent extremist groups have been quick to stake out territory in this uncertain world, and they have mastered these channels of persuasion with disconcerting ease. The challenge to governments and traditional authorities is to make the transition from being providers of public information, to also acting as sign-posters, kite-markers and supporters of other people's information.

Being a citizen – ways of participating

We are bored of the politicians. The young generation don't do anything, they don't go to meetings and things. We are not doing anything, we are just complaining. But I'm trying to do something. Films are part of trying to make things change.

Woman, Istanbul

Most of the forms of participation we have explored in this report are best defined as 'cultural participation'. But the dividing lines between different types of participation are becoming less distinct: 'cultural existence' has become a bolt-on to traditional ideas of 'the citizen'. As fewer people vote and join organisations, democracies (both well-established and emerging) are wrestling with what it means to be an active citizen. In the UK 'citizenship' is now part of the national curriculum.

What could possibly connect video making with citizenship? This is a legitimate question – even the most cursory survey of the videos produced by the route-around kids illustrates the fact that few are explicitly political. For those that are, there are legitimate questions to be raised about their impact in the offline world. We must be careful to avoid the temptation to celebrate a distinctly lazy form of political citizenship – it is

difficult to translate clicking on a link or signing an online petition into social change.

Nevertheless, places like the Video Republic are changing the terms on which we participate. When posting a video online you are making a statement (however trivial) and inviting others to comment – that means entering into a public debate. The debate may be of varying quality, but everyone who contributes is doing so on the same level. These forms of cultural exchange play a key role in helping people to define their relationship to others and to ideas. In *Entertaining the Citizen* Liesbeth van Zoonen makes the case for the popular culture as a resource for citizenship:

Popular culture does [have] its flaws, but it needs to be acknowledged as a relevant resource for political citizenship: a resource that produces comprehension and respect for popular political voices and that allows for more people to perform as citizens; a resource that can make citizenship more pleasurable, more engaging, and more inclusive.⁹⁷

Video enables more people to share their thoughts, and to do so using the frames of reference which are most meaningful to them – this often means incorporating popular culture in some way. Political commentary delivered via video ‘mash-ups’⁹⁸ are one of many ways that the distinction between ‘low brow’ popular culture and ‘high brow’ political debate is becoming ever more blurred. In some places, video culture is already operating as a new theatre of deliberation: it is one of several ways that we could grow alternative models of citizenship.

Where next?

Above all, the Video Republic we have described in this report illuminates the tension between personal expressions which are easy and immediate and collective decisions which seem slow and convoluted in comparison. A range of commentators have called for democratic renewal to bridge this gap and re-engage disillusioned citizens. In *Everyday Democracy* Demos argued:

Rather than clinging to a tattered model of constitutional democracy whose purchase on our lives is reducing daily, we should be investing in the evolution of new democratic institutions and practices which, in conjunction with revived constitutions, can underpin sustainable, self-organising societies.⁹⁹

These ‘new democratic institutions and practices’ now need to incorporate a visual, expressive dimension to be meaningful to the next generation of voters and citizens. Consequently, the major question arising from experiments in the Video Republic for decision makers should not be ‘how do we use video to communicate our messages?’. Rather, along with everyone else, they should ask how democracies will operate in a time when young people expect to be able to directly represent their own, more nuanced versions of themselves. Popular culture and personal information will be their raw materials; and videos, blogs and social networking sites are currently their tools of choice.

Whose role is it to translate these emotional, personal expressions into concrete outcomes? There is no simple answer, but there are a number of starting points and a number of compelling reasons to attempt such a reconciliation. In Chapter 2 we argued that the route-round kids are not finding enough satisfying opportunities for self-expression in the offline world. Now the onus is on a broad range of public and private organisations and institutions to forge a more meaningful connection and create those opportunities.

5 Recommendations

In East London at a housing project for ex-homeless young people we met Adam. He was taking part in the video-making workshop there, and he told us about his recent placement doing work experience at an MP's constituency office. Adam started to notice that every week a new stack of DVDs came through the post, from campaign groups, arts and educational initiatives. If decision makers need to start listening to the expressions taking place in the Video Republic, then is *this* the point at which the two should intersect? In Adam's opinion, we simply can't expect MPs to sit through hours of this footage:

If you look at how many tapes MPs get sent – so many, from all sorts of people – then it isn't realistic to think that they can watch them all. I don't think a young person can make a video, send it to an MP and expect it to get watched, really.¹⁰⁰

Adam's insight is important – even if politicians were to watch some of the videos they were sent, how would they decide which ones to watch? How should they act on what they had seen? If you can't make a video then does that mean your elected representative is less likely to listen to you? What *should* the relationship be between these messy expressions of identity, feeling, opinion and culture and the day to day business of decision making?

Starting from the principles of free speech and equal access, this chapter will outline ways that we could support a more mutually beneficial relationship between the Republic and the institutions it threatens to destabilise. While the Video Republic's separateness is an inherent part of its appeal for the 'route-around kids', we believe there is much to be gained from forging a more meaningful connection. The remainder of this chapter suggests ten principles to help us do so. We explore issues such

as *access* to the Republic (1–2), how the Republic is *regulated and governed* (3–6), and how tapping into the energy locked inside might help us to build a more *expressive democracy* (7–10).

1. Reading, writing and representing

As human beings we learn every day. Making movies, people will learn a lot – about the things we do every day and our everyday experiences. It lets people reflect on these things when you make films. It is, for me, about this learning.

Costa, London, London workshops¹⁰¹

In Chapter 3 we argued that as young people grow up in a digital culture they will find that their reputation precedes them – it will be harder and harder to opt out of an online public persona. In this respect those in this generation of young people are guinea pigs. We need an educational response that extends the focus beyond safety, towards broader questions of privacy and intellectual property. The EU's approach to media literacy should not only emphasise the importance of being literate in decoding media, but also in being active in content creation.¹⁰² While the education system has long recognised the value of viewing film as an educational tool, across Europe we need to make the leap into seeing children as *producers* of film, not just interpreters. Schools' 'cultural offer' should include enabling young people to build creative portfolios of this type of work¹⁰³ as much as organising conventional trips to museums, and offering painting and art history classes.

Recommendations

- Schools, universities and businesses should prepare young people for an era where CVs may well be obsolete, enabling them to manage their online reputation. They should pass on guidance from recruitment agencies and other experts to help them make informed decisions about what they put online and contribute to the Video Republic.

- To help young people be successful in an increasingly image rich culture, we cannot simply rely on their status as so-called ‘digital natives’. Educators have a responsibility to help young people to become fluent in audiovisual forms of communication from an early age.
- The formal education system should draw on the expertise of arts-based initiatives to unlock the potential of the video making currently taking place in the informal sphere.

2. Video-hosting platforms and social responsibility

ISPs, video-hosting services and social networking sites benefit hugely from the fact that millions of people are contributing to the Video Republic. But, as we saw in Chapter 3, the opportunity to participate is not open to everyone. As the prime financial beneficiaries of the Video Republic, these enterprises will increasingly be seen as bearing a partial responsibility for this uneven access. There are already a range of platforms hosting how-to videos on the web,¹⁰⁴ and the YouTube Screening Room regularly features acclaimed short films. However, there has been no long-term investment from the platforms themselves in disseminating expertise on *making* online videos. They would also do well to recognise that better videos will mean more traffic and better business for them in the long run.

Recommendations

- Some of the larger internet enterprises should pool a small portion of their profits into a foundation to support video making in parts of the world where there is none, and to improve the quality of videos online and offline. Their data sets would give them a good idea of how and where to act. This could represent an extension to the work of existing charities such as the Google Foundation.
- A ‘virtual video-making academy’ would provide trusted place for experts to share tips on how to communicate messages, start online campaigns and get short films noticed. Such spaces could

also host resources for schools and other institutions who want to develop learning with video.

3. Globally supported digital rights

To participate in the Video Republic on equal terms we need to establish a bedrock of democratic rights that guarantees our freedom to do so. That means protecting individuals from other people's misuse of technology or malicious behaviour. We also need to extend access to the technology and networks that enable people to engage with the Video Republic.

Recommendations

- A new international, Unesco-ratified charter of digital rights. This should draw on contributions from a full range of stakeholders: advocates of digital rights and freedom of expression, artists, industry leaders, legal experts and academics.
- It should proceed through an open debate in which the public can play a full part, building on existing work from organisations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Open Rights Group in the UK, and consumer groups. The charter should address international questions of privacy, data protection and access to technology.

4. Liberating the audiovisual creative commons

The raw material of the Video Republic is sound and images. If it is to mature into a place for informed public debate, then we will need to extend the quality and quantity of the material available for free use. In so doing, we will enable a greater number of people to remix, exchange and comment on culture. These assets do not have to be made available at the expense of the creative industries. Much content has been unnecessarily kept out of the European public domain.

Gathering dust in the archives of broadcasters, this material is ensnared in complex digital rights disputes; but in reality very little of this programming will ever reap economic returns.

Indeed, in the case of public broadcasters it was originally paid for by the people and so it should be returned to them. We support the recommendations of the Adelphi Charter, which argues:

*The expansion in the law's breadth, scope and term over the last 30 years has resulted in an intellectual property regime which is radically out of line with modern technological, economic and social trends. This threatens the chain of creativity and innovation on which we and future generations depend.*¹⁰⁵

We need a refreshed approach to intellectual property that places the health of the cultural exchange on an equal footing to economic interests. That means finding ways to release more archived content for use by the public, and embedding people's rights to transform and use the work creatively. These rights are vital to a healthy Video Republic that can live up to the potential we outline in this pamphlet.

Recommendations

- There are some categories of older public service broadcast material that could be afforded Creative Commons status. This process could be encouraged by a digital rights amnesty, and could be funded by a small levy on some blank media, such as DVDs.
- Andrew Gowers, in his review of intellectual property in the UK, argued for exemptions for creative, transformative or derivative works with content.¹⁰⁶ Developing ways to embed the rights to *transformative use* of content should be a priority. We have to ensure that people are free to adapt works in ways that do not leave them vulnerable to prosecution.

5. The dark side of the Video Republic

With good reason, the presence of objectionable or harmful material online has attracted increasing levels of attention over recent years.¹⁰⁷ Clearly, we need to avoid oppressive (and

generally ineffective) censorship, which would also damage the ethos of freedom of expression in the Video Republic. Our strategies for regulation should be based less on pre-filtering, and more on developing sophisticated methods of community-led censorship. Creating better categories and organisational systems will also enable those unfamiliar with the Video Republic to make sense of it from the outside.

Recommendations

- Currently the tools we have to distinguish between harmful content are too blunt: content is either deemed ‘inappropriate’ or is for over-18s only. People should have the ability to select age-rating systems for videos on websites. The average of these ratings could then be translated into a region’s film-rating classification system.
- Video-hosting platforms should enable users to collaborate on guidelines about what content to include and not include on their sites. This should involve open debate about what material is in the public interest, and what content breaches people’s privacy. If there is uncertainty about whether a video should be removed, video platforms should look to their users to decide. They could introduce a voluntary or random crowd jury and ask viewers to vote on whether to remove content.

6. Set the statistics free

Governments have started to recognise the value in liberating more information about the public sector.¹⁰⁸ Such transparency builds trust and enables us to track the emergence of new trends. However, much of the information about the cultural exchanges in the Video Republic remains beyond the reach of the public and so it is not available to researchers, writers and the media. There are good data protection reasons (alongside several commercial reasons) for not releasing personally identifiable details and statistics. Nevertheless, information about differences between towns, regions or countries would not infringe our privacy and need not threaten the commercial value of the data.

The rise of web 2.0 has been predicated on our natural desire to connect with others, but the public knows little about what all this activity adds up to.

Recommendation

- Video-sharing platforms should collaborate with bodies such as national statistics agencies and academic institutions to release this valuable information.

7. Videos aren't votes...

Video does not lend itself too easily to the process of decision making or direct representation. Video rarely helps us to convey a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer, but this is also a strength. It can offer an alternative type of public conversation: in the past, debate in the formal political realm has been limited to those with the skills in oratory or writing. Audiovisual tools could help people to illuminate issues as diverse as immigration, climate change and how to improve public services.

Recommendation

- Government and institutional consultation exercises should find ways to use video as an alternative tool for public *deliberation*. Consultations about issues as diverse as where to build a local park, whether to shut a hospital or even the ethics of stem cell research could be opened up to different groups by permitting people to submit videos rather than written responses. Such consultation processes should be seen to have clear outcomes, and should find ways of recognising and rewarding contributions.

8. Political party broadcasts

In the run up to the parliamentary elections in Croatia in 2007 videos of slips and blunders by politicians from the ruling HDZ party began to appear on the internet. Interior Minister Ivica

Kirin claimed that one popular video made by a 21-year-old boy had been made by the opposition, backing his allegation up by saying he had looked into ‘the YouTube servers’.¹⁰⁹ This triggered a chain of events that led to the opposition party, the SDP, walking out of parliament. As the election drew closer supporters of the HDZ produced their own clips attacking the leader of the opposition party: Zoran ‘no idea’ Milanovic.

As this chaotic chain of events in Croatia illustrates; in the age of YouTube, political campaigns can easily slip beyond the control of politicians. Or as one pundit said recently of the US elections: ‘The candidates don’t really control (the campaign) anymore. It is not something they do; it is something that is done to them.’¹¹⁰ Politicians should learn from the emerging patterns of political debate with video, which often depends on the creativity of the public rather than the decisions of spin doctors.

Recommendation

- Political figures need to avoid using online video to communicate in the same way that they would use television. Instead they should find innovative ways of harnessing the enthusiasm of their supporters, for example, by issuing audiovisual material to be used in videos or ‘endorsing’ and showcasing particular videos on their own websites.

9. Sifting the videos

To avoid being overwhelmed by the volume of audiovisual content we need to develop new ways of sorting through it. The more we are bombarded by information from an ever multiplying range of sources the more we need to be able to rely on trusted sources. While it isn’t possible for governments or public bodies to compete in terms of the number of videos being produced, they can enter into this crowded market in two very important ways. First, they can continue to act as ‘public information’ providers via video (for example, informing the public about how to apply for a passport, how to deal with mosquitos, and how many units of alcohol there are in a drink).

Second, they can start to ‘sift’ through videos to endorse those that could be helpful to people; many of them are currently buried under the ‘filing system’ of video-hosting platforms.

Recommendations

- The teams responsible for information distribution, communication or marketing for governments (for example, the Central Office of Information in the UK¹¹) should initiate the creation of short videos that detail the processes of democracy, decision making and public service in that country. They should work in partnership with video makers who have experience of communicating messages in a dynamic way.
- The government, other public bodies, charities and institutions could operate a ‘badge’ system, which signposts videos that will help people understand their work or processes.

10. Media alliances with the Republic

At the time of writing, in the UK the *Guardian* newspaper is running a feature on its website celebrating YouTube’s ‘treasure trove of rare and fascinating arts footage, lovingly posted by fans’. The list includes material as diverse as a rare late interview with Katharine Hepburn to footage of Maria Callas in Franco Zeffirelli’s production of *Tosca*. Meanwhile citizen journalism is helping to penetrate the areas beyond the reach of mainstream print or broadcast media. During the bombing of Lebanon in 2006, many of the attacks, particularly in Beirut, were documented by people on their mobile phones and uploaded to video-sharing websites. The videos instantaneously opened an intimate window on the controversial conflict. This type of content is giving viewers all over the world new insights into what it is like to be on the front line of a modern war.

Despite these pockets of innovation and information exchange, the relationship between the mainstream and the Republic is generally uneasy at best. While user-generated content can have an explosive impact, it is generally regarded

with condescension by the media. How can we grow a healthier relationship, which draws on the strengths of both spheres?

Recommendations

- Online sections of newspaper websites or TV channels should have space for people to contribute their videos, providing their own perspective on news.
- The media should take an active role in signposting a wider audience towards quality videos as well as ‘shocking’ or ‘novelty’ videos. By capturing this material and bringing it to a wider audience, they could help people make sense of the Republic.

The future of the Republic

I believe that the web will be good for freedom of expression in four respects. These are: the freedom to think what we like, to form and express our ideas independently; the freedom to shape our identities, to be who we want to be; the freedom as consumers to choose and buy what we want; and the freedom to express ourselves through creating things that matter to us.

Charles Leadbeater, *We Think*¹¹²

In the past, previous generations of young people in Europe fought to claim new freedoms for the individual. The Video Republic is being built by a generation who did not have to fight for those freedoms in the first place, but they will need to start renegotiating them in a digital age. There is a great deal at stake; politicians, the media, and our cultural and social institutions all need to enter into the fray alongside them or risk an unhealthy distance emerging between two parallel public spheres.

Being able to mediate and communicate your identity is a precondition of participation in tomorrow’s Europe. Cultural citizenship is a major part of being a European citizen; it is also central to the success of Europe as a shared project. The fact that young people are experimenting with new forms of cultural participation means that the trends described in this report can

offer us clues about the shape of Europe in the future. Video, a form of expression too often subject to indifference or derision, also holds huge potential to help reinvigorate the public realm and open up alternative forms of participation.

It is possible that the redistribution of power currently taking place in the Video Republic will only last for a brief moment in time. Online video and new media projects may cease to be synonymous with ‘young people’ – and perhaps all the better for it. The Video Republic already drives inter-cultural exchange; it should also become a site of inter-generational exchange. By giving people of any age a greater array of tools to influence their peers, their ideas and our public debates, we can also open channels for more direct, expressive relationships with each other and with our democracies.

Appendix 1

Expert interviews

Helsinki

Mikael Aaltonen and Jonna Strandberg

Theatre producers at Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, and organisers of the museum's URB festival

Fernando Colombo

Journalist, carrying out film editing in the Helsinki StrangerFestival workshops

Juha Huuskonen

Creative director of the Pixelache festival

Sampo Karjalainen

Creative director at Sulake (creators of virtual world Habbo Hotel)

Roope Mokka

Demos, Helsinki

Ann Morrison

Visual artist and technology researcher

Markus Renvall

Finnish visual artist

Maria Seppälä

Youth journalist at state broadcaster YLE

Leena Suurpää

Research director for the Finnish Youth Research Network

Tuija Talvitie

Director of the British Council in Finland

United Kingdom

Rhidian Davis

Curator, Public Programmes, British Film Institute

Dr Liesbeth de Block

Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education, researcher into children, migration and new media

Issy Harvey

Researcher into young people and video making and freelance practitioner

Simon Oatley

Director, Film Workshops

William Osgerby

Professor in Media, Culture and Communications (Youth Culture), London Metropolitan University

Andrew Sanders

Lecturer, Early Childhood Studies, University of Derby

Uta Staiger

International project manager, Signs of the City – Metropolis Speaking

Justin Stennett

CEO of The Bridge (bridging young people and politics with new media)

Yen Yau

Partnership manager, First Light movies
(www.firstlightmovies.com/)

Turkey

Bülent Doruker

General manager, Digital Film Academy

Can Kalaycioglu

Student and editor of youth supplement for Turkish Daily News

Kerem Kurdoglu

Film producer, theatre director

Yoruk Kurtaran

General coordinator, Gençlik çalışmaları (progressive youth work agency and research)

Pelin Turgut

Journalist and co-director, Istanbul International Independent Film Festival

Gokce Su Yogurtcuoglu

RESFEST Digital Film Festival, Turkey, producer and director

Romania

Diana Berceanu

Project coordinator, FDSC

Anca Berlogea

Director, Signis

Rodica Buzoianu

Psychologist and facilitator for Signis

Ciprian Ciucu

PR and marketing director, FDSC (a civil society think tank)

Mihai Gligor

Deputy director, Romanian film promotion

Napoleon Helmis

Film maker and workshop facilitator

Christopher Troxler

Executive director, Romania Think Tank

Berlin

Sven Fortmann

Lodown magazine

Thurit Kremer

Animator and artist, workshop facilitator

Appendix 1 Expert interviews

Hanna Mindermann
Schlesische 27, workshop facilitator

Netherlands
Nirit Peled
Film maker and visual artist

Appendix 2

Glossary

Channels

Personalised pages on video-hosting sites that contain an index to all the videos they have uploaded onto the central servers, and a certain amount of personal information.

File-sharing platforms

The array of different legal and illegal online platforms and protocols for transferring content from one computer to another.

File-sharing – peer-2-peer

A type of file-sharing software technology. This term refers to the system whereby file-sharing software puts one user's computer in touch with another's or with several others', and allows them to exchange content.

Intellectual property

The legal framework that grants an individual or company ownership of abstract material (for example ideas; designs; or written, audio or video content). Intellectual property is defined by the World Intellectual Property Organization as: 'a bundle of exclusive rights over creations of the mind, both artistic and commercial. The former is covered by copyright laws, which protect creative works, such as books, movies, music, paintings, photographs, and software, and gives the copyright holder exclusive right to control reproduction or adaptation of such works for a certain period of time.' The key phrase is obviously 'reproduction or adaptation', the traditional distribution methods for which have been turned upside down by video-hosting websites and the ubiquity of photo and video equipment, and digital editing and ripping software.

Intellectual property – Creative Commons

Creative Commons is a voluntary licensing system that offers a spectrum of possibilities between full copyright – all rights reserved – and the public domain – no rights reserved.

ISP

Internet service provider: a company that provides access to the web from your computer.

Mash-up

The process of heavily editing moving images from different pre-existing videos, and ‘mashing’ them together as a seamless entity.

Media convergence

The technological development that sees a single device, such as a mobile phone or games console, having access to many different forms of media.

Peers

Internet users exchanging content.

Ripping

Copying content from a media-storing device, such as a video-hosting platform, and saving it somewhere else as a separate file.

Streaming

The transfer of audio video data in such a way that the file can be viewed as the video downloads – the computer saves the file on its Random Access Memory (it isn’t saved to the hard disk).

Subscribers

Those who create an online association between themselves and a channel so that when a new video is uploaded to a channel, the subscriber is notified.

User-generated content

Audiovisual content created by consumers, rather than by corporate bodies.

Video-hosting platform

The servers to which users upload content, and the interface used to browse through it.

View count

The tally of clicks to a video's web address.

Vlogging

The practice of recording oneself on video, and archiving these recordings online.

Notes

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- 20 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X5ngh831UM (accessed 12 Sep 2008) and www.strangerfestival.com/node/2449 (accessed 12 Sep 2008).
- 21 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbgUjmeC-4o (accessed 3 Sep 2008).
- 22 1984 Apple's Macintosh Commercial, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYecfV3ubP8 (accessed 17 Aug 2008).
- 23 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYecfV3ubP8 (accessed 3 Sep 2008).
- 24 de Vellis, 'I made the "Vote Different" ad'.
- 25 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmkgPGxLtkY (accessed 3 Sep 2008).

- 26 ‘The machine is using us’, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nkoEOE (accessed 3 Sep 2008).
- 27 Jarvis, ‘Why YouTube gets my vote for political punditry’.
- 28 See www.ceecis.org/child_protection/word/TurkCCA.doc. Excerpt from ‘Common Country Assessment: Turkey 2004’. This is in stark contrast to our other case study countries where the trends point towards an ageing population.
- 29 The press is semi-independent, but there are numerous laws that stifle freedom of expression. This has particularly been the case for the Kurdish population; broadcasting in Kurdish was still illegal until very recently. Media centralisation and concentration in the hands of very few owners has become a major concern. One conglomerate, Doğan Group, owns 70 per cent of all Turkish media; see www.pressreference.com/Sw-Ur/Turkey.html (accessed 12 Sep 2008).
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- 31 See www.ceecis.org/child_protection/word/TurkCCA.doc. Excerpt from Common Country Assessment: Turkey 2004.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 See for example Unicef, *Child Poverty in Perspective*, and Unicef, *Innocenti Social Monitor 2004*.
- 34 Institute for Family Policies, *Report on the Evolution of the Family in Europe 2008*.
- 35 See for example, *Glossary of the Lisbon Strategy*, http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/lisbon_strategy_en.htm; and Baldwin, *Globalisation*.
- 36 European Commission, *Third Annual Report on Migration and Integration, 2007*.

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- 38 European Commission, *Young Europeans in 2001*.
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- 40 European Commission, ‘Despite political hiccups, European identity on the rise’.
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- 43 Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood*.
- 44 According to the Demos Index of Everyday Democracy (which uses indicators to measure democracy in the family, workplace, aspirations, electoral, activism, public services): see Skidmore and Bound, *The Everyday Democracy Index*.
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- 48 EurActiv, *European Elections: Outlook for 2009*.
- 49 Interview for Video Republic research, Feb 2008.
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- 53 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.
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- 61 Bradwell and Gallagher, *FYI*.
- 62 Shirky, C, *Here Comes Everybody*.
- 63 Leadbeater, *We Think*.
- 64 European Commission, *Progress Report on the Single European Electronic Communications Market 2007*.
- 65 Ibid.
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- 68 Livingstone and Helsper, ‘Gradations in digital inclusion’.
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- 85 Boyd, 'Why youth (heart) social network sites: the role of networked publics in teenage social life'.
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- 88 See www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Webs/BK/DE/Aktuelles/VideoPodcast/video-podcast.html (accessed 12 Sep 2008).
- 89 See www.direktzurkanzlerin.de/ (accessed 12 Sep 2008).
- 90 See www.youtube.com/EUtube (accessed 12 Sep 2008).
- 91 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=koRlFnBIDHo (accessed 3 Sep 2008).
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96 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*.

97 van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*.

98 See Chapter 1.

99 Bentley, *Everyday Democracy*.

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101 *Ibid.*

102 Commission of the European Communities, *A European Approach to Media Literacy in the Digital Environment*.

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Cheap digital technology and broadband access have broken the moving-image monopoly held by production companies and broadcasters. In its place a new theatre of public information has emerged: a messy, alternative realm of video creation and exchange that extends across the internet, television, festivals and campaigns. This report charts the rise of the 'Video Republic' across Europe, a new space for debate and expression dominated by young people.

Drawing on extensive research with experts and young people in the UK, Turkey, Germany, Romania and Finland, it argues that the stakes are high, both for the contributors to this realm and for the democracies they live in. Confusion about regulation, copyright and privacy means that young people are plunging headlong into an uncertain set of new relationships online. And around Europe, new types of expressive inequality are emerging as many are held back from participating by poor access and a lack of resources.

As young people experience greater freedoms online, many are choosing to 'route around' political and cultural institutions rather than take them on directly. This poses a profound challenge to decision-makers, but it also creates new opportunities. For democracies starved of legitimacy, it offers hope for a new sphere of democratic expression and participation. With a range of recommendations for government, media and the private sector, this report outlines how we can channel the creativity locked inside the Video Republic.

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