

## **Unruly publics and the fourth estate on YouTube**

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### **Abstract**

It is now commonly claimed that new online platforms have made news more participatory, more of a 'conversation' than a 'lecture'. Mainstream news outlets, though in principle keen to capitalise on new opportunities for engagement with audiences, are often tentative in the steps they take in this direction. Various commercial risks, as well as opportunities, are associated with linking branded content to the frequently rancorous and hostile arenas of online conversation. This paper looks at the example of YouTube, a notoriously unruly and uncivil conversational domain, and explores some of the textures and facets of conversational participation by audiences now being staged within the official branded channels of established mainstream news outlets. Combining analysis of comment threads with theoretical reflections on the nature and function of online conversation spaces such as that provided by YouTube, this paper considers the value of such spaces for the outlet, for audiences and for the public sphere at large.

**Keywords:** YouTube, news, public sphere.

### **Introduction – YouTube and the Public Sphere**

In a 2008 report entitled 'The Flattening of Politics', YouTube's news and political editor, Steve Grove, sketched out some of the benefits for mainstream news organisations that embrace the new 'political ecosystem' of the social media sphere (2008). A number of outlets including CNN, the BBC, Fox News, The New York Times, The Guardian, Associated Press and Reuters have YouTube channels, some providing more extensive content archives than others. There are, of course, strategic and commercial risks for media organisations that *don't* engage with this dominant new platform. The issue is not merely one of heightening an outlet's visibility in today's hyper-competitive attention economy but is also one of control: media outlets routinely find their content circulating round social networks *unofficially* in any case and there may be compelling reasons (rights management challenges notwithstanding) to provide such content on an official, branded and advertising-supported basis. But the benefits of engagement that Grove lauds are simultaneously commercial *and*

civic. Political campaigners, NGOs and interest groups have found, via YouTube and other online social networks, unprecedented opportunities to connect *directly* with the citizens their messages are tailored towards (and, as a by-product, with new non-target audiences). So too, Grove argues, mainstream media organisations—far from being rendered redundant in this increasingly unfiltered communications environment—have an important role to play in shaping what he describes as 'the world's largest town hall for political discussion'. Whilst much has been made of the 'wisdom of the crowd' acting in a kind of 'Fifth Estate' role (Cooper, 2006)—be it citizen journalists 'scooping' the Fourth Estate with immediate eyewitness footage, or bloggers who take apart the biases, omissions and factual inaccuracies of mainstream media reports—still, or perhaps more than ever, 'citizens desperately need the Fourth Estate to provide depth, context and analysis that only comes with experience and the sharpening of the craft' (Grove, 2008). We might also append to this list of professional media virtues citizens' dependency on the resources (labour, technology, access credentials etc.) of mainstream media.

Unsurprisingly, Grove does not rehearse the risks that mainstream media may face in venturing into this relatively low-cost/high-reach medium, be it the risks of cannibalising traditional revenue streams or, significantly, exposing a media brand to a forum for unmoderated—and notoriously *uncivil*—public discussion. Grove is of course interested in promoting a positive vision of YouTube's conversational qualities in order to attract media buy-in: it is conversation that promises to improve the 'stickiness' of the YouTube platform, giving advertisers better access to users who will stay longer and return more often to particular channels. For Grove, the strategic paradigm for communications professionals has shifted in the era of online social networks from a linear one of dissemination towards an interactive one based on participation. Here the issue becomes one of how various agents (be they candidates, lobby groups or news organisations) 'get their ... messages into the conversation' (Grove, 2008). Grove is drawing on a trope that has now become commonplace in discussions of news in the digital age. Dan Gillmor (2004) is one particularly influential commentator on the rise of citizen journalism who has argued forcefully that, in the twenty-first century, news has become less akin to a 'lecture' and more akin to a 'conversation'. The implications for those in professional journalism who fail to heed this flattening and ostensibly democratising shift are ominous. But the term 'conversation' itself risks being conceptually flattened. Not all conversations are of equal quality or civic value and the conversations that play out on YouTube are often perceived as an outlet for anger, boredom, semi-literacy and self-publicity rather than civil deliberation. This stereotypical (which is not to say wholly unfounded) image of YouTube as a medium with a low signal-to-noise ratio is underscored by the attempts that owners Google have made to introduce tools (such as spam markers and comments ratings) to improve that ratio. A third party tool available as a Firefox browser extension called 'YouTube Comment Snob', which allows users to set tolerance thresholds for bad spelling, profanity, all-caps and excessive punctuation, neatly exemplifies the dubious reputation YouTube has acquired.

Grove's positive view of YouTube's conversational qualities is contested not only within the end-user community but also by many social media professionals. Consider, as an exemplar, the views of Senior Vice-President (Digital Strategy) of PR firm Ogilvy Worldwide. In a blog post entitled 'Why Brands Should Skip the "Conversation" on YouTube' Rohit Bhargava draws a stark contrast between the genuinely valuable conversations of the Web 2.0 environment at large and the debased racism, swearing and 'idiotic' conversations of YouTube specifically:

In every other medium, from blogs to microsites to forums, comments are great. They invite conversation and offer a chance for dialogue... Look at most blogs, and the comments will likely add to the dialogue. That's not the case on YouTube, and I think we are all noticing it... For some reason, commenting on videos encourages stupidity. (2007)

His recommended strategies of moderating or disabling comments on YouTube also carry risks, though, especially perhaps for commercial media outlets whereby accusations of censorship can be highly problematic for brand reputation. The dilemmas faced here can be rather starkly exemplified by the case of Al Jazeera English, which disables comments on a large number of its YouTube videos. The following thread on one of their comments-enabled videos illustrates a double bind: the risks of frustrating viewers' Fifth Estate aspirations *and* the risks of opening up the channel, thereby exposing the brand to the kind of debasement of which some social media marketers warn:

The screenshot shows a YouTube comment thread with the following content:

- caleta21** (2 months ago): Reply 0. Comment: "To all and Aljazeera, It would be great if you leave the comments on, like some said before me. And if some idiot says something unadecuate like this a\*\*hole jetsamjetsam, we mark them as spam and it won't be shown anymore. We are at the end serious people, that is why we prefer Aljazeera from the other "news" channels"
- jetsamjetsam** (3 months ago): Reply -5. Comment: "bitch, i wanna cum in your face."
- afghanmountainking** (3 months ago): Reply +1. Comment: "I thought Alzeera is an independent but I realized that it is not different than western so -called free media. Alzeera use word like dictator, terrorist. The drama of election in Afghanistan is not real news it is a total western propaganda but Aljazeera uses as a headline like CNN, Fox news and BBC."
- loqutor** (3 months ago): Reply +10. Comment: "Al Jazeera English, could you please stop disabling the comments? You do a great job reporting stories, so please let us discuss them."
- VeilhoMc** (3 months ago): Reply +4. Comment: "I agree. Also, I think people should stop giving their videos 5 stars when comments are disabled. That should be our way of protesting."
- Dallah1990** (3 months ago): Reply +2. Comment: "They most likely disable comments because youtube is infested with internet trolls. And if that's why they disable the comments then i totally agree with them. Although discussing the stories would be a very interesting to do nevertheless. =)"

In search of a more discriminating perspective, scholarly analysis of the conversational qualities of new media spaces is often framed (explicitly or implicitly) by a Habermasian

'public sphere' ethos (Habermas, 1989). The temptation is to weigh up the *potential* that interactive spaces like YouTube provide for civic and deliberative dialogue against the messier realities of the communication actually occurring. Analysing YouTube according to such a normative yardstick, it is liable to be found seriously wanting. Terms like 'deliberation' and 'dialogue' suggest, among other things, an orientation towards turn-taking and the mutual quest for an overlap between 'horizons of understanding' (if not necessarily consensus). But these norms are, of course, generated *a priori* rather than discerned empirically.<sup>1</sup> Investigating how YouTube 'conversations' operate beyond the normative boundaries of the public sphere ethos, though, does not compel us towards uncritical *description* (less still, populist *celebration*) of their alterity and resistance to singular normative frameworks.

It may well be valuable to seek to understand such incontinent new media spaces as 'heterotopias' (after Foucault, 1967) rather than as Habermasian 'public spheres' (see, for example, Haider and Sundin, 2010). Yet the fact is that many people remain keenly interested in (and invest hope and energy in) the civic potentials of new media forums such as YouTube. This includes many journalists and other news professionals but also many YouTube users themselves as the thread excerpted above exemplifies. Just as historians have brought out the more 'feral' qualities of the historical public spheres overly idealised in Habermas's own work *without* throwing the baby out with the bathwater (see Calhoun, 1992), so too we can investigate the public sphere afforded by YouTube in the context of (rather than as subsumed by) its complex, contradictory and somewhat chaotic textures. Our approach in this paper is, then, to contribute to a 'thickening out' (in Clifford Geertz's [1973: 3-30] anthropological sense) of the idea of the public sphere in order to add to the stock of more realistic insights into the nature and civic implications of the conversations playing out on YouTube. The premise for this approach is our qualified agreement with a leading anthropologist of online social networks in her observation that 'Given the scholarly attention to civic publics, it is often hard to remember that people participate in public life for other reasons; identity development, status negotiation, community maintenance, and so on' (boyd, 2008: 243). Our agreement is qualified by the obverse observation that it is also necessary to remember that people often participate in social media spaces for civic reasons and not merely to pursue projects related to self-identity, status and community.

The discussion that follows provides just a partial insight but our discussion is based on close analysis of a number of YouTube channels set up by mainstream news media outlets. This focus was chosen for a number of related reasons. Firstly, mainstream media channels can be seen as located at a kind of fault-line between the disorganised (anarchic, even) and bottom-up ethos of Web 2.0 on the one hand and, on the other, the organised, top-down ethos commonly associated with so-called 'Big Media' (Gillmor, 2004). Secondly, they can be seen as located at the fault-line between fears for the entropic fragmentation of the public sphere into micro-niches and digital 'echo chambers' (Sunstein, 2007) on the one hand and,

on the other, fears about the power of 'Big Media' to colonise the new media realm, to corral public attention and to reassert their agenda-setting powers against the original democratising ethos of the Web. Thirdly, following on from this, the progressive tightening up of rights management policy and enforcement by owner Google means that, should YouTube sustain its hegemonic position as default global video platform on the Web, then professionally produced news content will come to circulate more exclusively within these official branded channels as the relative gatekeeping powers of the user-base are scaled back. We begin by sketching some basic characteristics of the channels investigated in our research, drawing attention to some of those most relevant to their status as forums of dialogue and deliberation. Subsequently, we will discuss some of the key themes that appear to us to emerge from close investigation of these channels and the comments they elicited from the perspective of assessing the civic role of YouTube debates or 'conversations': specifically, this includes looking at issues of framing, critique, play and ritual, identity, and competition. All of these issues are interconnected but we have separated them out here for the sake of clarity.

### **Mainstream news channels on YouTube**

We focused our primary research on eight distinct YouTube news channels: Al Jazeera English, Associated Press (AP), Reuters, The Guardian, CBS News, Fox News, The New York Times (NYT), and MSNBC News.<sup>2</sup> This range covers a broad spectrum of intensities of engagement with YouTube as a platform, from MSNBC whose channel has remained dormant since mid-2008; through The Guardian and NYT which both maintain regular posting of videos (NYT uploading in a relatively continual stream, The Guardian doing so more often in periodic batches) but not a high visibility on their websites; to Al Jazeera English which posts bulletins and reports continually and advertises its YouTube channel with moderate prominence (a second level page) on its website (previous versions of their website had carried a YouTube link on the front page). Of course, the varying levels of engagement, which admittedly demonstrate a level of ambivalence when taken as a whole, cannot be explained solely in terms of differing perceptions of YouTube's value per se on the part of news media outlets. Rather, they will reflect that perception made in the context of a complex range of factors including differing core missions, commercial strategies and target audiences and the different ways in which YouTube might be seen to complement (as opposed to cannibalise) the overall range of platforms (on and offline) now deployed by mainstream news outlets. For example, as daily newspapers (albeit increasingly online ones), The Guardian and NYT can readily use a video medium such as YouTube to complement their print journalism. The Guardian, in particular, tends to use YouTube for magazine-style soft news pieces or else short documentary-style stories that are not easily accommodated within the daily news cycle, both of which fulfill a clearly secondary role to their core mission. Fox News, Al Jazeera English, CBS and MSNBC are all primarily television news broadcasters, so the majority of their YouTube videos are excerpts from their television bulletins and the segments often include news anchors framing the reports.

Reuters and Associated Press also have bulletin-style videos with a voiceover, although being news agencies rather than broadcasters, generally do not include the framing device of the news anchor.

Despite an a level of ambivalence on the part of mainstream news outlets who have certainly not treated YouTube as a way to radically shake up their approach to news production and distribution, the outlets that continue to use their YouTube channels are seeing growing numbers of subscribers, and not merely ad hoc viewers, indicating that YouTube channels may indeed contribute towards building 'relationships' with audiences and not merely serving as an ad hoc distribution channel. In the twelve month period from early 2010 to early 2011 we noted that CBS, AP, Reuters, The Guardian, NYT and Al Jazeera had all roughly doubled the number of subscribers to their channels (albeit modest figures given the outlets' potential reach), with Fox News an exception having dropped more than 50%.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the comments and debates elicited by mainstream news outlets' postings was undertaken in the early part of 2010. During the period of the research, YouTube introduced some major (and controversial) changes to its interface which are relevant to its potential as a conversational platform. These include the elevation of 'highest rated' comments to the top of the page and the de-coupling of comments from their replies in the display (replaced by the Twitteresque convention of the @ sign to indicate a reply), both of which impact on the ease of using YouTube for tracing (and potentially joining) dialogic interchange.<sup>4</sup>

We looked at the thirty 'most viewed' videos for each channel, excluding videos we considered 'soft' (focusing solely on lifestyle and/or entertainment stories). We then looked at a minimum of the first fifty comments that were posted in response to each of these videos<sup>5</sup>. Whilst the main purpose of the analysis was to provide some qualitative insights into the nature of YouTube-based 'conversation', the most viewed videos across our eight selected channels generated some interesting numerical indicators. Relying on YouTube's own demographic data, with the caveats that entails<sup>6</sup>, our sample of 240 most viewed videos suggests a strong demographic skew in terms of gender and age. Taken as a whole: 85% of videos were most popular with male users (Al Jazeera was most heavily gendered with 97% of videos being favoured by males and NYT least gendered with 73%); and 71% were most popular with users aged 35 and over (with 90% of MSNBC's videos most popular with over 35s at one end of the spectrum, and 53% of NYTs at the other). This picture jars somewhat with both the balanced demographic profile of the YouTube 'community' writ large claimed by owners Google<sup>7</sup> and also the stereotypical image of YouTube as a haven for adolescents. It should be noted, of course, that these viewing figures tell us nothing of the composition of *commenters* on YouTube but they are striking indicators, at least, of both the likelihood of a gender skew *and* of a potentially older demographic than we may otherwise be tempted to presume.

We were also interested in obtaining a broad indicator of how much ‘conversation’ occurs on these news channels, and did so by looking at the number of responses posted (both written and video) as a percentage of the total views. This gave us a blunt ‘interactivity quotient’ indicating some notable variations between channels, notwithstanding the seemingly low figures across the board. In descending order, the thirty most viewed videos of each of our selected channels exhibited the following ‘interactivity quotients’:

MSNBC (now dormant)	0.48
Fox News	0.35
Al Jazeera English	0.24
Reuters	0.19
The Guardian	0.16
Associated Press	0.12
CBS	0.09
NYT	0.06

**Table 1:** *Interactivity quotients for YouTube media channels*

We also looked at the number of comments within our sample that were replies to other users, indicating the amount of ‘dialogue’ (regardless of quality) elicited by videos. This ‘conversation quotient’ (the percentage of comments that were addressed to other commenters) was less variable than the interactivity quotient<sup>8</sup>:

Al Jazeera English	44%
Reuters	42%
CBS	34%
MSNBC (now dormant)	33%
Associated Press	33%
Fox News	31%
NYT	30%
The Guardian	28%

**Table 1:** *Conversation quotients for YouTube media channels*

This conversation quotient highlights, at least, that the greatest amount of user participation does not necessarily translate into the greatest degree of community discussion and debate. Fox News, for example, is seen here to stimulate a greater response rate than Al Jazeera English, but the latter generates higher rates of interaction between audience members. The two print news outlets in our sample, score moderately on interactivity but are at the bottom of the table for discussion between audience members. We are not in a position here to propose whether this may be influenced primarily by media form, target markets, ideological stances or other factors. But the disparity between the two sets of rankings warns us against any simply conflation of interactivity per se with

community participation or civic engagement. That said, taken together, these two measures seem to suggest that, whilst the number of users writing comments on videos is relatively small, those that do are, on average, quite likely to interact with other users.

Having sketched out some of the very basic indicators of mainstream news media's YouTube channels, we will now draw out some of the key themes that emerged from our analysis of the comments and discussions arising in response to most viewed videos. We are, of necessity, selecting issues and examples that struck us as pertinent to an understanding of YouTube's role in the contemporary public sphere and the discussion that follows is intended to be exploratory and to provoke further debate rather than to present a systematic content analysis.

### **Framing and agenda-setting**

What constitutes a civic 'virtue' or 'vice' will often depend on the observer's perspective. When a conversation thread moves significantly away from the central topic or theme of the video, this may constitute evidence of civic *agency* in the eyes of a social scientist, but may be viewed negatively as veering off-topic by a news outlet or political campaign manager, for example, who will have a vested interest in the authorial intent of the video and the (hereby thwarted) potential for direct audience feedback. Grove (2008) claims that 'YouTube provides an automatic focus group for news content' but when the conversation 'goes feral', the effectiveness of these spaces as instantaneous (and cheap) focus groups is questionable. It becomes impossible to control for demographic variables or optimal group size (if 'group' is even an appropriate term in this context given its spatial and temporal dispersal), whilst 'focus' is beyond the control of any single facilitator at best and lacking altogether at worst. One of Fox News' most viewed YouTube videos (more than 56,500 views at the time of writing) reports on the attack on the Pope by a woman during a service in the Vatican during December, 2009<sup>9</sup>. A very small fraction of the comments focus on the physical attack itself. (As a blunt indicator of this, of 543 comments just seventeen mention the word 'attack' and only seven mention the word 'security'<sup>10</sup> though these were primary themes in the video). Overwhelmingly, the debate dwells on sweeping and clashing religious and ideological worldviews—a very common outcome of comment threads on YouTube almost regardless of source material—and on the moral integrity (or lack thereof) of the Catholic Church as an institution. Are users lazily straying into clichéd generalities or actually embedding the story in a broader context despite it being reported by Fox merely as a self-contained event? Both explanations have some plausibility. What is clear, though, is that on YouTube, comment threads numbering in the hundreds and often dispersed over many months will nevertheless tend to settle into a particular thematic focus (or small number of key foci): such a focus, however, will often be something other than that apparently encoded into the news items itself.

Such forms of 'reframing' are typical in YouTube debates on news videos: this happens largely as a cumulative by-product of viewer engagement and the associative nature of ordinary conversation in everyday life. However, on occasions, it is possible to discern a more conscious, concerted and targeted reframing at play. One of The Guardian's most viewed videos (nearly half a million views at the time of writing, together with more than 14,000 comments and still appearing almost two years after the video was posted) provides narrated footage of a fatal police assault on Ian Tomlinson who appeared to have inadvertently got caught up in the London G20 protests of 2008 whilst walking home from work.<sup>11</sup> Consider the following example of an unusually high-rated and very early comment that simultaneously invokes three rather different frames (personal tragedy, institutional culpability and class antagonism) that then resonate strongly through the ensuing debate:

**LawfordLad** (9 months ago)

Reply +43  

My heart goes out to Mr Tomlinsons family, i am so sorry for your loss. I truly hope that this 'Police Officer' is brought to justice along with any others who try to cover this up! Shame on the Police force who are supposed to protect us, not the capatalist selfish minority.

Reframing may be even more conscious and targeted than this, of course, as users explicitly critique the choice of language used by the media and by other users. A video on the New York Times channel exploring why increasingly politicised Pakistani pop music is largely 'silent' on the Taliban<sup>12</sup>, for example, leads to exchanges questioning the vocabulary taken for granted in the piece itself:

**talhabmasood** (1 month ago)

Reply | Spam 0  

why do each and every american is so much concerned about the individual opinions of Pakistanis.....Pakistanis have got the right to have an opinion....and no stupid biased person have right to call that opinion wrong! like that ass hole nadeem paracha was saying!!...the term "Taliban" has been converted (deliberately by the west, i'd say) into such a phenomenon which means "Terrorism".....taliban only meant "the people who are eager to study"

**superiorgreen** (2 months ago)

Reply | Spam 0  

Pakistan had the same people it now calls "the taliban", fighting for independence in Northern Pakistan since it was created. The tribal areas would be fighting Pakistan, even if 911 and America had never happened. They were fighting BEFORE the invasion, and will be fighting long after we leave. The best solution for Pakistan is to call in the American airstrikes, killing it's citizens while keeping public support. The US is told it is Al-Qaeda, and they bomb, keeping a corrupt regime in power

**3072645** (2 months ago)

Reply | Spam 0  

Please learn to differentiate between the Taliban and the indigenous tribal people. They are not the same. Sure they Taliban may find their supporters to mostly hail from the tribal areas but many tribes are fighting the Taliban as well and more recently there have been Taliban movements in Punjab, which is far removed from the tribal areas you refer to.

The Taliban are descendants of the Mujahideen that fought against the Soviets in the late 80s.

Mainstream media are commonly thought to enjoy relative 'agenda-setting' powers. The classic formulation of the agenda-setting model, namely that 'the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about' (Cohen cited in McCombs and Shaw, 1977: 177), reflects, albeit simplistically, a staple negative view of 'old media' that underpins a good deal of excitement about the 'new' news media landscape. However credible this classic model of audience dependency (and its credibility has long been contested), the prospects for slavish adherence to an editorialised news agenda on the part of audiences are eroded not only by the intensification of supply channels but also by the potentially amorphous and limitless threads of conversation now being publicly woven beyond the confines of physical social spaces.

But the introduction of greater 'chaos' into the system should not lead us to impute a boundless fluidity to the public discourse. The 'stickiness factor' (Gladwell, 2001) of particular frames and thematic foci that come to dominate YouTube threads often appear to be driven by the 'controversy factor'. Those seeking a public sphere of rational deliberation (or even the ebb and flow of competitive 'debating', traditionally conceived) are disconcertingly confronted on YouTube with something that looks rather like a game space in which 'hot button' topics, frames and tropes are deployed to *trigger* reactions and to *capture* attention. This ludic aspect may help to explain the tendency for repetitive regress towards generic themes (for example, liberal vs conservative ideological tropes, conspiracy theories or religion) that serve as a kind of catalytic agent or in-game currency in the competition for attention. Moreover, this ludic dimension may be reinforced to some extent by certain interface design elements within the YouTube platform such as the graphical popularity indicators and the 'top comments' feature.

### **The problem of (in)civility**

The way that users deploy their critical energies in YouTube 'conversations' is an important consideration for those interested in the communicative ethics of today's digital public spheres. Critical energies are generally targeted towards valuing (positively or negatively) one or more of the following: video content (including perceived slant and spin); protagonists (including figures not explicitly referred to in the video but implicated by users<sup>13</sup>); the specific news outlet (as an institution and/or personnel including journalists and anchors); mainstream news media in general; and other users (including their arguments, worldviews, language skills or presumed identities in terms of ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality). To analyse the *rationality* of the arguments, opinions and critique articulated on YouTube news channels lies beyond the scope of this paper. What is evident, though, is that the widespread *incivility* of YouTube comments is commonly and understandably perceived to constitute an obstacle to the functioning of a meaningful public sphere of deliberation. To point out the pervasiveness of ad hominem arguments as an obstacle to rationality, though (as if all that is required is to critique existent discourse), is

to miss the broader point that a climate of hostility and excessive insults *attracts* those with sufficiently thick skin who may revel in such environments whilst excluding those who find the atmosphere repellent: the obstacle is to YouTube's democratic inclusivity and not merely its rationality.

The tendency for the public sphere model to pathologise outright any forms of discourse that do not conform to standards of mutual respect, sincerity and 'good faith' (the warrant that one enters into conversation with the motivation, at least, to reach mutual understanding or accommodation) has been subject to critique by those who see a need for greater nuance. Anger, dismay, parody and irony, for example, are all potentially disruptive gestures that can puncture pomposity or complacency within mainstream perspectives and their prohibition may therefore be to the greater detriment of marginal, rather than dominant voices (see, for example, Dahlgren, 2005: 157-60; 2009: 89). Chantal Mouffe has argued in favour of an 'agonistic' public sphere that treats dissent and conflict as the lifeblood of, rather than obstacle to, civil society. She distinguishes this from 'antagonistic' public spheres: in agonistic public spheres 'adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretation to become hegemonic, but they do not question the legitimacy of their opponents' right to fight for their position' (Mouffe, 2005: 126). YouTube debates muddy such distinctions as it is commonly unclear whether an aggressive comment constitutes a legitimate move in a hegemonic contest or one that (by design or by consequence) works to silence opponents. A hot-headed argument on The Guardian channel following a video on Richard Dawkins' book *The Greatest Show on Earth* features various comments like this one:

shreddakj (3 months ago)

Reply +8  

What's with all these creationists posting on this video? Stop spreading your lies christians.

Do such comments robustly but legitimately call attention to the dubious communicative ethics of one's opponents (such as making ill-informed scientific claims) or work to silence and declare them illegitimate participants in the debate? Such routine comments show just how difficult a theoretical distinction between agonism and antagonism is to adjudicate in practice.

## **The Carnavalesque**

Initially outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin as a literary mode in relation to a work of Renaissance fiction, the idea of the carnivalesque provides a useful heuristic for grasping the complexity and messiness present in the everyday interactions of citizens in mediated public spaces and seemingly amplified in the environment of YouTube. In his examination of Rabelais' novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Bakhtin argued that the work successfully captures the lived, everyday culture of the people, specifically the folk culture and celebration of carnival

humour which was 'sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials' (1984: 5). Bakhtin's exploration of the carnivalesque is viewed by Michael Gardiner as providing a suitable alternative framework for reading public dialogue and civic engagement through the emphasis on the 'transgressive, utopian and festive qualities of human societies' (Gardiner, 2004: 42) in contrast to the Habermasian public sphere's emphasis on rational-critical deliberation. The excessive qualities of human behaviour, including the expression of emotion, humour and performative idiocy, which commonly take prominence on YouTube, suggest that we should at least augment our normative notions of the public sphere with a critical appreciation for the carnivalesque. Indeed, recent scholarship alludes to the carnivalesque by emphasising the playful and excessive qualities of YouTube. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green describe the site as characterised by a sense of 'playfulness and affect' (Burgess and Green 2009: 103) and, in a similar vein, Zizi Papacharissi notes the 'playful mood' of YouTube, the prevalence of satirical material encouraging 'a creative and no-sense pastiche of content... Where blogging provides the pulpit, YouTube provides the irreverence, humor, and unpredictability necessary for rejuvenating political conversation trapped in conventional formulas' (Papacharissi, 2009: 38). Aaron Hess argues that on YouTube 'acts of parody and pastiche are vital forms of speaking out and resistance' (2009: 429). It is, of course, important to keep in mind that YouTube's culture of humorous irreverence is keenly appropriated and sanitised by the official public sphere—one need think only of the 'humour' and 'irreverence' of occasional questions selected by media in their 'interactive' political coverage (whether Redneck camp in the CNN/YouTube presidential debates of 2008<sup>14</sup> or apple-munching at Obama in the 2011 YouTube post-State of the Union interview<sup>15</sup>).

Nevertheless, if Grove declares YouTube to be 'the world's largest town hall for political discussion' then our concept of the town hall needs expanding to account for the carnivalesque qualities infusing new forms of civic engagement. YouTube's 'town hall' invokes Iris Marion Young's notion of the 'wild publics' of the mid-nineteenth century, mixing 'serious discourse with play' and 'the aesthetic with the political' (1987: 64). Gardiner asserts that the '*real* public sphere', the one proposed by Habermas, was 'always marked by a pluralistic and conflictual heteroglossia' (2004: 38, emphasis in original). We may perceive an assumed agenda for discussion, but one cannot predict the wishes, whims and behaviour of the 'residents' (and, indeed, itinerants) of the 'town' of YouTube, who bring forth different, often unanticipated goals and intentions in their use of the spaces provided. The inevitable tension created by this plurality of voices and conversational objectives manifests itself in threads of user comment, where it is apparent that reaching consensus is often not a necessary or achievable goal. In fact, we may plausibly see dissensus itself as a common goal—common in the sense of frequent but also, paradoxically, in the sense of a certain unity of purpose or interest. As already noted, many presumably thick-skinned individuals clearly extract enjoyment from an overtly antagonistic environment, revelling in the excess and conflict involved in 'YouTube dramas' (Burgess and Green, 2009: 96). The tensions

emanating from this 'serious play' are frequently manifest. In comments posted in response to a *New York Times* report covering worldwide reactions to the 2008 US election result, 'nijasam08' expresses disapproval of the conversational drift toward crude racism including speculation about the size of Obama's penis. On critiquing the essentialist attitudes present in the thread, 'nijasam08' is advised by 'killahkoreah' to learn to 'take a joke douch bag'. After all, 'who takes youtubes comments serious?' Such exchanges serve also to remind us of Michael Warner's (1992) critique of Habermas's disembodied conception of the public sphere (which serves not to level inequalities but to reinforce the marginal status of 'marked' or 'different' bodies). Diverse and conflictual *bodies*—and not merely voices—encounter each other in these only superficially 'disembodied' digital spaces. This is reflected in aggression toward embodied others (racism and homophobia for example) but also in the affective qualities of, for example, rage, exhilaration or hurt.

Like user comments, the content and approach of *video responses* frequently deviates from accepted notions of the rational or civic-minded. But it's important not to dismiss the significance that these outward expressions of emotion, sarcasm or seemingly irrelevant humour have for civic engagement. Video responses posted in reaction to news channel videos on YouTube further underscore the relevance of the carnivalesque, capturing a diverse range of approaches in terms of content, tone and performativity. Of four video responses posted in reaction to a Fox News Channel's report on a courthouse shootout<sup>16</sup>, two adopt similar vlog-style modes of address and yet the video content of each occupies a different end of the spectrum in terms of emotional expression and civility.

'Larrbear061355' speaks in hushed tones into his webcam, delivering his opinion on how the government might be implicated in such events, whilst 'AtlasPuked1985' responds by criticising Fox News' coverage in angry mood, using coarse language ('Fuck news! Fuck Fox!') and gesticulating wildly. The remaining two video responses employ humour instead: 'zero2242' posts 'How to be a Skank', bearing no obvious connection with the original Fox report, while 'coldsnapfrostnova' posts a seemingly insignificant visual detail from the story footage, a close-up of a billboard promotion for cut-price prime rib shown in the news report, adding the voiceover 'Holy shit, twelve ounce prime rib, only \$4.99!' Each of these videos, posted in response to the same item, reflects a very different mode of response and whilst this is not place to weigh up their relative value (civic, resistive, aesthetic or otherwise), they underscore the important point that there is no singular mode privileged within YouTube: this unruly heteroglossia should keep our eyes open to the potential for emergent civic and resistive behaviours on YouTube even amid the apparent noise and banality on the one hand and bland corporatisation on the other.

### **Community and ritual**

News media are strongly implicated in the sphere of modern ritual, as news consumption emphasises timeliness and simultaneity, with audiences seeking not merely information but the sense that they are part of a wider community of news watchers. In *Imagined*

*Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson highlighted the newspaper's function as a mechanism for enabling imaginary links between members of a nation, linking development of daily newspaper reading habits to the rituals of morning prayer. In a related vein, Nick Couldry has emphasised the role of modern media in facilitating a sense of social cohesion through 'media rituals', namely, 'the whole range of situations where media themselves 'stand in', or appear to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, *connected* as members of a society' (2003: 4, emphasis in original). Since the late twentieth century, globalisation and digitisation have altered and radically complicated the contours of our now plural and intersecting 'imagined communities' and of our media rituals. But despite its asynchronicity, the rituals of participation in mediated events on YouTube news channels can serve a cohesive function, with users able to constitute imagined communities on the fly. (This ad hoc and transient characteristic should not be taken to imply something necessarily more 'organic' than the imagined communities of traditional media given, precisely, that they are commonly constituted in response to events brought to light *by* mainstream media outlets). The sense of a 'live' community, united by common interests, is supported by props such as viewing figures, latest-first comments and video responses. It is also manifested in conventions such as the greeting 'Hey YouTube!' (and variations thereof) commonly adopted in vlog-style video responses and in references to 'we' and 'us' in user comments. Such devices signify a sense of togetherness, a virtual co-presence that can bridge geographic, demographic and even ideological differences

Videos posted in the immediate aftermath of large political scandals or natural disasters tend to draw the bulk of their traffic in a single burst. In the month following the Haiti earthquake of January 2010, a video posted on the CBS YouTube channel<sup>17</sup> received over 1.2 million views, over twenty-two thousand comments and two hundred video responses. A year later, the number of views had increased to approximately 1.7 million (i.e. the video received 70% of its views in the first month) and the comments had crept up to just over twenty-three thousand (i.e. approximately 95% came in the first month, and many of the subsequent comments were posted around the anniversary of the event which had featured in the mainstream news agenda). And the number of video responses is now reduced by more than half, as many have been subsequently removed. None of this is surprising in the context of our common perceptions of the speed of the news cycle (and the audience attention cycle). But it contrasts with the temporality of some other news videos on YouTube such as the Guardian footage of the G20 protests (mentioned earlier in the paper) which has elicited a far more even stream of comment across its almost two year lifespan so far. The earthquake coverage provides a forum for mediated ritual mourning (Pantti and Sumiala, 2009) which is also a setting for feelings of globalised solidarity. But this should not be taken as a dismissive reading of excessive sentimentalism (although amateur videos posted on YouTube in response to the earthquake were often replete with sentimentalism, often expressed in music as well as words). In both the comments and video responses

posted to news channels covering the Haiti earthquake, the most common theme was a humanitarian one, with users posting pleas for donations and inserting the relevant phone numbers or web addresses. In amongst the requests for donations, users expressed criticism of the relief effort in Haiti, reflecting Simon Cottle's claim that 'mediatized disasters can sometimes open up the possibilities for social reflexivity, political critique and censure' (2006: 422). Although the comments examined were not entirely free of hatred<sup>18</sup>, the sense of solidarity and solemnity sought by users in general in response to this particular event may be read as a positive form of civic engagement.

The repetition of sentiment expressed by users in comments and video responses may itself act as a kind of social glue. Pantti and Sumiala discuss the growing role of media in providing forums for audiences to discuss tragic local or global events (2009: 132). YouTube provides such spaces, allowing users to work through both private and collective grief in a public setting. They argue that such features are implicated in an increasing 'emotionalization of public life' (133). In both the comments and video responses to the CBS News story on the Haiti earthquake, the outpouring of sentiment from individual users coalesces into a collective expression of emotion. Comments posted in a timely fashion which adequately encapsulate the dominant sentiment (better still if the user reveals a personal connection to the event) are likely to receive high 'thumbs up' ratings:<sup>19</sup>



The image shows a screenshot of two YouTube comments. The first comment is from user 'bballmaxa4lifeman' (1 month ago) and reads: 'please pray for the haitians! so many inocent people are dying becauz of this disaster! my mom is crying her guts out just to get connection with her family in haiti! shes telling her family in US to try to call haiti!!! its just very sadning!'. It has 114 replies and thumbs up/down icons. The second comment is from user 'bboydominicano23' (1 month ago) and reads: 'im with you bro im dominican...and i got family there..'. It has 9 replies and thumbs up/down icons.

In these contexts of collective grief, repetition is affirmed rather than derided as it is in standard modes of debate or even mere everyday conversation. Online forums such as discussion boards, for example, are notoriously intolerant of posters who inadvertently litter (rather than 'add value' to) threads by making a point or asking a question already covered previously by others. Where collective ritual and, especially, an opportunity to foster intense collective emotion (whether shock, anger, sadness, relief or 'hope') are at stake, very different rules apply and the apparently trite is not merely tolerated but actively encouraged.

### **Identity and status**

Actively 'joining the conversation' on YouTube—be it via writing comments, posting video responses or voting thumbs up/thumbs down—is also inevitably tied to processes of

identity-building and the pursuit of status and recognition. Whilst in face-to-face contexts people must always carry their physical markers of identification on their bodies, the nature of digital networks—rather than facilitating the erasure of bodily identity as once imagined—requires users to ‘write themselves into being’ (Sundén cited by boyd, 2007: 145). Networking platforms such as Facebook, encourage users to present a version of themselves which (more or less) corresponds to their ‘offline’ persona. YouTube, however, is designed first and foremost for the purpose of video-sharing, and thus grants its users the level of anonymity they choose themselves. Users are therefore liable to reveal selective slivers of personal information in contrast to the more comprehensive disclosure (and performance) encouraged by Facebook. It is commonly assumed that users will tend to reveal/construct characteristics which they believe will be the most appealing in the online environment (Agger, 2004: 99). But in our examination of YouTube comments, it was clear that users are commonly concerned with constructing personae or identities that underscore the point they are trying to make in argument in addition to an emphasis on markers of political and/or religious affiliation.

A comment thread on a video posted by The Guardian, which features an interview with actor Pete Postlethwaite about his film *The Age of Stupid*, presents a striking illustration:

The screenshot shows a vertical list of six YouTube comments. Each comment includes the user's name, the time it was posted (all are '6 months ago'), and a 'Reply | Spam' link. To the right of the text are icons for thumbs down and thumbs up, with a numerical count. The comments are as follows:

- tractorlad1** (6 months ago) Reply | Spam -5  
hi very funny Pete Postlethwaite is still a posh twat all he can say is i was born poor . well we all are but shag the right lass and thaen have millions
- CardboardGuru** (6 months ago) Reply | Spam -1  
At the end of the clip, when he's talking about negative people, he means you. Pete Postlethwaite comes from Warrington and worked nights as a sheet metal worker to get himself through drama school. He certainly doesn't come from a posh background. Sure he's more wealthy than you are now, but that's because he's been successful by being good at what he does, and you haven't.
- tractorlad1** (6 months ago) Hide Reply | Spam -6  
how the fuck do you know what i have done . i run 5 trucks . but i have not sold out. if a mans a cunt i will call him a cunt no matter who the hell he is and i dont go for tea with royals like peter posh twat
- CardboardGuru** (6 months ago) Reply | Spam -1  
You really do belong in the age of stupid. You're ignorant, vulgar and jealous of other people's success.
- tractorlad1** (6 months ago) Reply | Spam -5  
you know nowt mr middel class so piss off mr snob
- CardboardGuru** (6 months ago) Reply | Spam +1  
That'd be:  
You know nothing Mr Middle Class, so piss off Mr Snob.  
Though of course giving me two different names in the same sentence is even stupider than your spelling and grammar.  
Hope that helps.

Agger's idea of revealing attractive features of one's identity online does not quite ring true here, as it is obvious that 'tractorlad1' is not trying to ingratiate himself to other users or win a popularity contest. Instead, he emphasises his working-class background to solidify his point and try to bulldoze (and hence 'win') the argument. It is tempting to dismiss 'tractorlad1' merely as a troll but, aside from our inability to assess his sincerity<sup>20</sup>, attempting to do so would merely duck the point that 'serious play' is a normal feature of YouTube and blurs the very distinction between 'authentic' and 'fake' discourse. Later in the thread, another user jumps in to back up 'CardboardGuru': 'I hope this is just an internet persona of yours and not what you are like in real life. Otherwise, you really must be unbearable'. Such a comment manages to cling to a binary model of the real versus the fake whilst acknowledging the indeterminacy that YouTube seems to foster in practice. Despite the anonymity afforded by YouTube, some users do, of course, choose to collapse the boundaries between their private and public selves, publishing similar kinds of personal details on their 'profile' pages that you would see on sites like Facebook, or posting video responses that show them sitting face-on to the camera talking about their views, feelings and lives. Erika Pearson has referred to the 'glass bedroom' of YouTube which is 'neither an entirely private space, nor a true backstage space as Goffman articulated, though it takes elements of both over the course of its use' (2009). The nature of YouTube means that this kind of identity performance as *disclosure* (often more radical than other social networking platforms because of the central role of video performance) can happen alongside the aforementioned identity *play*.

Much of the dialogue that occurs in YouTube comments can also be viewed as part of a ludic quest for status and recognition amongst users. The competitive nature of YouTube interaction is never seen more clearly than in 'first!' posts, where users simply boast that they are first to comment on a particular video without, in fact, commenting at all<sup>21</sup>:



The higher the expectation that a video will be heavily viewed, the higher the satisfaction in posting the first comment. It may be, of course, that the troll-like satisfaction of provoking a reaction against this kind of performative idiocy is the primary source of pleasure as opposed to a genuine sense of competitive triumph. In any case, it is clear that many users of YouTube (and particularly those who participate in dialogues on comment boards) are involved in an ongoing quest for one-upmanship. This dynamic quite obviously underlies a

large number of comment threads, where users try to out-do each other by providing the most 'facts', the most influential argument or the wittiest comment. The following example is excerpted from a comment thread on a New York Times video about the 'One Laptop Per Child' project, which aims to provide students in Third World countries with laptops. In this thread, users 'NewRadical78' and 'knottsknocks' keep trying to out-do each other by adding related facts and personal experience:

The screenshot shows a comment thread with four entries. Each entry includes the user's name, the time since they posted, and a 'Reply | Spam' link. The first comment is from NewRadical78 (1 year ago), stating that laptops are not the solution in nations where bullets are more available than water, and that books and paper still educate people. The second comment is from knottsknocks (1 month ago), claiming a laptop could download thousands of pages worth of books. The third comment is from NewRadical78 (1 month ago), arguing that in nations where AK-74s cost \$9 each and bullets are in endless supply, laptops are only given to militant groups, and that the user is a 'retarded fucking troll'. The fourth comment is from knottsknocks (1 month ago), responding that they are just making a point about education and that they have an X-O laptop that downloads books.

What's notable, of course, is the Monty Python-esque juxtaposition of substantive reasoning and extreme personal attack which would seem strange in most offline contexts but is standard YouTube fare. 'Hating' on YouTube can easily become something of a light-hearted but keenly contested sport.

## Conclusion

For Grove to describe YouTube as a 'town hall for political discussion' (2008) is clearly simplistic and perhaps even disingenuous in its attempt to woo mainstream news media into a fuller and less equivocal embrace of this immensely popular platform. But YouTube is not merely relying on rhetoric to convince doubters that it can, despite its unruly reputation, be deployed strategically by news outlets wishing to deepen their connection with target audiences in a time of great upheaval and uncertainty in the media industries; that the low signal-to-noise ratio can be turned around; that the ambience of the 'conversation' can be calibrated appropriately to the requirements of particular media brands; and that the 'fun' of YouTube can be safely harnessed to add value to user experience rather than corrupt the brand. As already noted, the controversial interface changes of 2010 have privileged the individualised response and engaging in and following any sustained user-to-user dialogue has become more difficult: this amounts to a nudge

towards atomisation or 'crowd dispersal'. Offering, enhancing and encouraging the use of moderation tools available to content providers is another way of addressing the unruliness. Grove's own interview with Obama in early 2011, in which he acted as mediator for user-submitted and user-ranked questions, may be less a shot across the bows of mainstream news media by YouTube/Google as an aspiring content provider than a demonstration to big media clients of how YouTube can be used to harness audience participation in a fun, personalised and corporately safe way, where unpredictability is erased and users are flattered as partners but kept in their place, made to wait their turn (if selected) and denied the right of reply—a 'flattening of politics' somewhat different from that implied in the title of Grove's 2008 article. This reading is reinforced by a CBS interview with Grove<sup>22</sup> shortly afterwards in which he talked proudly of the role of new media in general and of the 'light curatorial swoop' by professional media which this format facilitates.

But in seeking to contribute to a thickening out of our understanding of the culture of YouTube, and by taking the ostensibly 'serious' end of the spectrum (material posted by mainstream news outlets) as our point of departure, we have tried to show how the serious and the frivolous, the rational and the emotive, the civic and the carnivalesque, are not so easily prised apart. YouTube is as much village tavern as town hall and the crowd is not so easily dispersed. It is perhaps unsurprising to see some reticence on the part of news mainstream media. At the time of writing, YouTube remains a noisy, messy place that brings people into strange new forms of contact with other people (and not merely with brands, with mainstream media and with those in power). Very often, mainstream media texts—including news but also advertising, television clips and music videos—function as catalytic agents for those unruly encounters. Deliberation and dialogue are certainly part of the picture, but this cannot possibly be untangled from the gamesmanship, the ritual, the identity play, the conflicts and the pleasures that have already become so deeply woven into the fabric of this still young platform.

### **Biographical notes:**

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We are here, of necessity, glossing over a complex philosophical debate engaged in by Habermas and his critics over the metaphysical (or otherwise) status of deliberative norms.

<sup>2</sup> This selection was intended to represent a reasonable diversity of high profile outlets but were also shaped by convenience. For example, we excluded BBC World and CNN International from our study as the content was not accessible from the location of the researchers due to copyright restrictions. As such, we make no claim to offer comprehensive or fully generalisable analysis. Our analysis is simply intended to assist in a cumulative project of increasing and diversifying critical analysis of YouTube as a civic space. We also excluded ABC News from our study as the channel had disabled all comments.

<sup>3</sup> Between January 29, 2010 and January 29, 2011 CBS subscribers grew from 12,104 to 29,189; AP from 78,729 to 147,696; Reuters from 10,818 to 20,712; The Guardian from 2208 to 5083; NYT from 22,064 to 45,026; Al Jazeera from 78,365 to 149,365. Fox News declined from 46,165 to 21,501. These numbers are, of course, subject to fluctuations. Slight variations between the figures displayed on channel pages and in search listings reinforce the need to taken them only as a rough guide.

<sup>4</sup> Another notable change was the removal of the 5-star rating system in favour of the binary thumbs-up or thumbs down – something Google has maintained provides a more robust indicator of popularity but which many users feel is superficial and part of a dumbing down process.

<sup>5</sup> Where threads and themes of debate continued beyond the first fifty posts we continued until these were broken (which is not to say that they were not picked up again subsequently).

<sup>6</sup> YouTube data is predicated upon uneven access to users' (genuine) demographic data. Aside from reliability, their validity as anything other than the bluntest of indicators of audience composition is questionable. These major caveats aside, the gender and age skews noted here are essential to note in order to present a realistic impression of the YouTube 'community'.

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<sup>7</sup> From YouTube's 'Fact Sheet': "Our user base is broad in age range, 18-55, evenly divided between males and females, and spanning all geographies. Fifty-one percent of our users go to YouTube weekly or more often, and 52 percent of 18-34 year-olds share videos often with friends and colleagues. With such a large and diverse user base, YouTube offers something for everyone."  
[http://www.youtube.com/t/fact\\_sheet](http://www.youtube.com/t/fact_sheet)

<sup>8</sup> Percentage figures are rounded – again, we do not wish to give the impression that these figures offer anything more than a blunt indication.

<sup>9</sup> The item has since been removed from YouTube. The source video can be accessed at:  
<http://video.foxnews.com/v/3957454/pope-attacked/>

<sup>10</sup> Note: two instances of 'attack' and one of 'security' were discounted because they were used in different contexts, namely as in 'attacking religious beliefs' and 'cyber-security'.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HECMVdl-9SQ>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK8CqZQ8XHY>

<sup>13</sup> To give just one example here, videos on the so-called 'Climategate' scandal prompting commenters to attack Al Gore, despite his lack of any direct involvement in the event itself or mention in the news segments.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrPnWoZTjIQ&feature=relmfu>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9EHbQqyrjs>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=helbjYxhQ8A>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lySBI2aq-A>

<sup>18</sup> Comments containing racist and hateful views posted on the story were usually quashed by other users during the aftermath, expressing their dislike through replying to the negative comments (either directly or indirectly) or clicking on the thumbs down button. Such virulent racism has become prominent, though, in more recent comments.

<sup>19</sup> CBS – Haiti Earthquake Aftermath: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lySBI2aq-A>

<sup>20</sup> A year later, in the aftermath of Postlethwaite's death, a user 'yorkshiretractors' (one would suspect this identity is owned by the same user as 'tractorlad1') can be found still embroiled in this kind of argument.

<sup>21</sup> From a video on the Fox News channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Mgwtqf2Qzo>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.mediabistro.com/webnewser/youtube%E2%80%99s-steve-grove-on-the-hot-seat-at-cbs-news-political-hotsheet\\_b11821](http://www.mediabistro.com/webnewser/youtube%E2%80%99s-steve-grove-on-the-hot-seat-at-cbs-news-political-hotsheet_b11821)