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**Fictionalising Re(a)lationality:
The Social Media Storyworld of *Nothing Much to Do***

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in Media, Film and Television

The University of Auckland, 2017

by
Rachel Berryman

Abstract

This thesis investigates the evocation of real-world relationality by works of fiction authored for social media. In particular, it examines *Nothing Much to Do* (2014), a literary adaptation web series which spreads its modernisation of Shakespeare's comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* (1612) across YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. Moving beyond the popular phrase 'transmedia,' the thesis characterises this narrative structure as an example of 'distributed adaptation,' a term which encompasses the limitations and innovations involved in adapting a well-known story across multiple platforms. Updating the medium-specific lenses of both adaptation studies and digital narratology, it undertakes an exploration of the various social media environments involved in *Nothing Much to Do's* narrative expression. This analysis reveals that the series' creators were able to diversify their narrative contributions by embracing the affordances unique to each platform, and further still by proactively engaging with the user behaviours and conventions most popular across them. These efforts also enabled *Nothing Much to Do's* creators to elicit the relational dynamics invested in real-world social media practices, directing them towards the fictional bodies of the characters so as to heighten the audience's attachment to the series. This thesis thus contributes new knowledge to longstanding debates about media predicated upon mimicry of the real, proposing that distributed adaptations such as *Nothing Much to Do* evince the pleasure of knowingly engaging with overtly fictional content *as though* it were real.

Acknowledgements

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the unwavering patience, support and confidence of my wonderful family and friends. I am also wholeheartedly indebted to my supervisors Allan Cameron and Misha Kavka, whose mentorship encouraged, challenged and inspired me every step of the way.

The next step in understanding what delights or dangers digital narrative will bring to us is to look more closely at its characteristic pleasures, to judge in what ways they are continuous with older narrative traditions and in what ways they offer access to new beauty and new truths about ourselves and the world we move through.

— Janet H. Murray
Hamlet on the Holodeck

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Introduction

In 1998, Janet Murray speculated that the twenty-first century would see the emergence of ‘sophisticated Web soap[s]’ which expertly incorporated the affordances unique to computer-based fictions, ‘allow[ing] pleasures ... unattainable in broadcast soaps.’¹ Rather than reproducing the modes of storytelling found in novels or films, Murray prophesized that these ‘Web stories’ would shift ‘away from the formats of older media and towards new conventions in order to satisfy the desires aroused by the digital environment.’² Almost two decades later, Murray’s hypotheses ring true with eerie accuracy, realized by an ever-expanding canon of original web series (as they are now called) which are not only distributed online, but also increasingly incorporate the conventions, behaviours and language of our contemporary ‘digital environment’ into their stories and structures. To date, these projects have been largely led by amateur content creators working outside of established broadcast industries, who self- or crowd-fund their projects for (typically niche) online audiences.

This thesis is concerned with an increasingly popular sub-set of such efforts which, as Murray predicted, foreground a mode of storytelling in equal parts inspired by and inseparable from the affordances of contemporary digital technologies. Variouslly labelled the *literary adaptation web series* or *literary-inspired web series*, texts of this type transpose classic works of literature to contemporary settings and platforms, characterising their protagonists as modern-day YouTube vloggers (video-bloggers) who record short video updates about their lives and share them with the internet. Typically, these web series extend beyond audio-visual content to also include diegetic social media profiles for their characters, variously located on social network sites (SNS) such as Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram.³ Viewers are encouraged to follow the characters from platform to platform, searching for, subscribing to, and engaging with the content distributed across each website in order to appreciate the narrative as a whole.

¹ Janet Horowitz Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 68.

² Ibid.

³ danah m. boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, ‘Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 211.

In both form and structure, literary adaptation web series embrace the procedural, archival, fragmented, instantaneous and participatory qualities emblematic of contemporary digital media. Their stories are told not only *on* social media sites, but are distributed *across* social media platforms, evoking a nexus of narrative information which combines the multimodal specificities of each. As Murray foresaw, this has the effect of ‘reshap[ing] the spectrum of narrative expression, not by replacing the novel or the movie but by continuing their timeless bardic work within another framework.’⁴ Indeed, the intrigue of these web series rests not only in their utilization of innovative storytelling methods, but also in their incorporation of these techniques into adaptations of celebrated works of literature. Much as Linda Hutcheon proposes that part of the pleasure of adapted texts derives ‘from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise,’⁵ literary adaptation web series foreground the pleasures of new media in their modernizations of canonical literary texts.

Accordingly, this thesis examines literary adaptation web series with specific reference to their status as adaptations. Bypassing the ouroboros of fidelity criticism,⁶ it takes up an increasingly prominent preoccupation within the field of adaptation studies, exploring what cross-medium adaptations may gain from the introduction of the narrative affordances of new media technologies. This notion is discussed in Hutcheon’s authoritative text *A Theory of Adaptation* (2015), for instance, which outlines the differences in audience expectations, modes of engagement, and experiences of temporality and spatiality across filmic, televisual, and ‘digital’ adaptations, such as video games and interactive art installations.⁷ Hutcheon’s relatively limited purview of what constitutes digital adaptations is expanded by Siobhan O’Flynn’s epilogue to the second edition of the book, which offers a more expansive conceptualisation of the impact of web-based technologies within the field.⁸ In O’Flynn’s view, ‘the rise of the social web with the increasing popularity of participatory media, blogs, and wikis, the

⁴ Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 10.

⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

⁶ For an overview of these debates, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 6–7.

⁷ See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*.

⁸ Siobhan O’Flynn, ‘Epilogue’, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, by Linda Hutcheon, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 179–206.

increase in smart mobile devices that support these interactions, the viral dissemination of DIY content online through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, and the revolution of touch-screen interfaces,⁹ has had significant implications for the relationship between fans, producers and texts, enhancing audiences' ability to produce and circulate works which adapt—via remixing, transposing or elaborating on—elements of their favourite fictional works.

What is missing from O'Flynn's account, however, is the recognition of social media as an adaptive medium in its own right, not simply as a site for web-based additions to established filmic or televisual texts. This oversight is surprising not just because the number of social media adaptations is steadily increasing, as discussed in Chapter Two, but also because these adaptations—unlike those which move from book to film, or vice versa—use as their framework a medium not intended for narrative expression. Indeed, despite an developing canon of scholarship on non-fictional storytelling on social media,¹⁰ research into their (original) fictional counterparts is limited at present to a single conference paper authored by Eugenia Kuznetsova, whose outline of the genre markers of so-called 'social media fictions' is explored at length in Chapter Two.¹¹ In order to contribute to this emerging strain of research, this thesis updates the medium-specific lenses of both adaptation studies and digital narratology, the academic field concerned with 'stories that depend on a computer for their production and display,'¹² celebrating literary adaptation web series as illustrations of social media's fictional potential.

The literary adaptation web series originated with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-3, henceforth *LBD*), a modernized adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

⁹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁰ Investigating the auto-biographical narratives published, circulated and consumed by everyday social media users, this area of research includes texts such as Anna De Fina, 'Storytelling and Audience Reactions in Social Media', *Language in Society* 45, no. 4 (2016): 473–98; Stine Lomborg, *Social Media, Social Genres: Making Sense of the Ordinary* (New York & Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Ruth Page, 'Re-Examining Narrativity: Small Stories in Status Updates', *Text & Talk - An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse & Communication Studies* 30, no. 4 (2010): 423–444; Ruth E. Page, *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Ruth Page, 'Seriality and Storytelling in Social Media', *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 5, no. 1 (2013): 31–54.

¹¹ Eugenia Kuznetsova, 'Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform and the Rise of Social Media Fiction', in *Proceedings of the European Conference on Social Media: ECSM 2014*, ed. Asher Rospigliosi and Sue Greener (University of Brighton: Academic Conferences and Publishing International Ltd., 2014), 271.

¹² Page, *Stories and Social Media*, 3.

(1813) created by Hank Green and Bernie Su.¹³ In this retelling, Elizabeth ‘Lizzie’ Bennet is a graduate student studying mass communications. Enlisting the help of her best friend Charlotte, Lizzie starts a vlogging channel where—often accompanied by her sisters Jane and Lydia—she discusses her life and new developments in her familial, professional and romantic relationships. In addition to Lizzie’s YouTube channel, which hosted *LBD*’s primary narrative, the series made use of three other vlogging channels, each curated by different characters, as well as an impressive number of profiles across a range of social media sites in order to tell the story. Hailed for its creative spin on Austen’s novel and its innovative, cross-platform structure, the series has proved an overwhelming success. At the time of writing, *LBD* boasts more than 70 million video views on Lizzie’s YouTube channel alone, two spin-off book deals,¹⁴ over \$460,000 in fan donations raised towards the production of series DVDs,¹⁵ as well as a 2013 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media.

Within the academy, *LBD* has been studied for its postfeminist adaptation of Austen’s novel,¹⁶ its integration within and embodiment of fan culture,¹⁷ and its illustration of the tensions between fans and creators in participatory mediascapes.¹⁸ It has also received substantial praise for its innovative narrative structure, which is often described as an example of ‘transmedia storytelling,’ borrowing the term popularised

¹³ Playlists of all the videos from *LBD* may be accessed at ‘The Lizzie Bennet Diaries - YouTube’, accessed 22 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/user/LizzieBennet/playlists>.

¹⁴ Bernie Su and Kate Rorick, *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet* (New York: Touchstone, 2014); Kate Rorick and Rachel Kiley, *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet* (New York: Touchstone, 2015).

¹⁵ ‘The Lizzie Bennet Diaries DVD...and More!’, *Kickstarter*, accessed 24 February 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/pemberleydigital/the-lizzie-bennet-diaries-dvdand-more>.

¹⁶ See, for example, Vitana Kostadinova, ‘Jane Austen Adapted: Female Lifestyles in *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’, in *Growing Up a Woman: The Private/Public Divide in the Narratives of Female Development*, ed. Soňa Šnircová and Milena Kostić (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 312–33; Noelle M. Kozak, ‘New Media Adaptations of Classic Literature: From *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’, *Inquiries Journal* 8, no. 10 (2016), <http://www.inquiresjournal.com/articles/1468/new-media-adaptations-of-classic-literature-from-pride-and-prejudice-to-the-lizzie-bennet-diaries>; Lori Halvorsen Zerne, ‘Ideology in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’, *Persuasions On-Line* 34, no. 1 (2013), <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol34no1/zerne.html>.

¹⁷ See Louisa Ellen Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 160–65; Louisa Stein, ‘The Digital Literary Fangirl Network: Representing Fannishness in the Transmedia Web Series’, in *Seeing Fans: Representations of Fandom in Media and Popular Culture*, ed. Lucy Bennett and Paul Booth (New York & London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 169–80.

¹⁸ Jessica Seymour, Jenny Roth, and Monica Flegel, ‘The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Fan-Creator Interactions and New Online Storytelling’, *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 4, no. 2–3 (2015): 99–114.

by Henry Jenkins in order to theorize the series' use of multiple social media platforms.¹⁹ As detailed in Chapter Two, however, I do not consider this term to be the most appropriate nor productive descriptor for the series. In contrast to dominant theorizations of transmedia storytelling, in which multiple texts are commissioned to extend a sprawling narrative universe, *LBD* uses multiple social media platforms in order to convey a single story. While *LBD*'s 'Transmedia Producer' Jay Bushman attempts to reconcile this difference by proposing that the term may be used to describe both 'multiple standalone stories on multiple types of media that are all connected to the same storyworld' and 'telling a single cohesive story over several different channels,'²⁰ I argue that 'transmedia' does not encompass the complexities unique to *LBD*'s multi-platform structure, including the imbalanced distribution of content across the narrative sources it employs and the narratological influence of the series' social media context(s). What's more, the term does nothing to acknowledge the narrative parameters these sources must operate within due to the series' status as an adaptation.

I propose that web series such as *LBD* should instead be labelled *distributed adaptations*, a term which draws attention to the limitations and innovations involved in adapting a well-known story across multiple platforms. In this thesis, I am particularly interested in exploring the influence of social media's unique affordances on the presentation and reception of these texts. To date, this topic has received little scholarly attention, save for two notable exceptions: Silke Jandl's "*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age*" and Jessica Seymour's "*Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media*." Both articles consider distributed adaptations specifically in relation to and inseparable from their social media contexts, exploring the interactivity characteristic of this storytelling form both

¹⁹ See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Marama Whyte, 'Exclusive Interview: Jay Bushman on Transmedia in "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries"', *Hypable*, 18 February 2013, <http://www.hypable.com/lizzie-bennet-diaries-jay-bushman-interview/>.

across platforms,²¹ and between a range of examples from this newly consolidated storytelling genre.²²

Building on Jandl and Seymour's analyses, this thesis seeks to contextualise the social media environments which inform the production and aesthetics of distributed adaptations. In addition, it aims to explore two concepts outlined by these authors which I consider inseparable in more recent examples of distributed adaptations: namely, Jandl's 'medium specific authenticity'²³ and Seymour's 'textual bodies.'²⁴ As Jandl observes, *LBD* was 'produced with such an air of authenticity as to attract the attention of an audience unaware of its status as an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.'²⁵ Her analysis implies but does not fully explore the claim that this 'air of authenticity' was evoked by the creators' successful attempts to engage with both the form *and* conventions of YouTube vlogging, modelling their videos after user practices popular across the platform.²⁶ Moreover, Jandl only discusses this concept of 'medium specific authenticity' in relation to YouTube, while I argue that it is a central concern for each of the social media platforms utilized by distributed adaptations such as *LBD*. Indeed, it is through the combination of activity across these platforms that they may establish what Seymour calls 'textual bodies,' a term referring to the peculiar spatiality of characters who 'are reduced to textual bodies in the context of the internet space.'²⁷ This thesis proposes that by adhering to and reproducing the conventions of each social media platform they use for narrative expression, the creators of distributed adaptations characterise their protagonists as *convincing* 'textual bodies,' which—as detailed in Chapters Three and Four—is in turn more likely to encourage the viewers to respond to the characters *as though they were real*.

²¹ Silke Jandl, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 40, no. 1/2 (2015): 167–96.

²² Jessica Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', in *Minding the Gap: Writing Across Thresholds and Fault Lines*, ed. Gail Pittaway and Thom Conroy (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 105–15.

²³ Jandl, 'Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', 178.

²⁴ Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', 107.

²⁵ Jandl, 'Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', 181.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179–83.

²⁷ Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', 107.

Following *LBD*, a multitude of distributed adaptations have emerged, each reproducing the narrative formula the series established by transposing the stories of classic works to the modern day and distributing their narratives across a number of social media platforms. One notable example is *Nothing Much to Do* (2014; henceforth *NMTD*), a modernization of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1612) produced by four young women from Auckland, New Zealand.²⁸ Inspired by their enjoyment of *LBD*, Minnie Grace, Claris Jacobs, and sisters Elsie and Sally Bollinger—who have since adopted the moniker the Candle Wasters—decided to produce a literary adaptation web series of their own. As Elsie Bollinger recounts, after *LBD* wrapped,

... we were thinking, “A lot of people are going to be making more series like this, especially ‘inspired by’ classic novel and plays and things.” So we thought, like, hypothetically, what would we do if we were to make a web series? And we thought about Shakespeare. And we’re all big Shakespeare nerds, and one of our favourite Shakespeare plays is *Much Ado About Nothing*, and we were thinking, “It would be really great if you had Benedick and Beatrice saying their soliloquies directly to the camera” – just like people do nowadays with vlogs. And so we talked about this for a while, and then we realized – well, why don’t we just do that, then? And so we did. And that turned into *NMTD*.²⁹

Joining the extensive canon of filmic and televisual adaptations based on *Much Ado*, *NMTD* follows the lives of a group of high school students from Messina High, charting the friendships, dramas and romances which develop among them. As in *Much Ado*, the series’ narrative largely revolves around the realization of the romantic potential of arch-nemeses Beatrice Duke and Benedick Hobbes, paralleled against the dramatic dissolution of the relationship between Beatrice’s cousin Hero and Benedick’s best friend Claudio. Aligning with the distributed narrative structure introduced by *LBD*, *NMTD* is told predominantly through YouTube vlogs, but also includes character profiles on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. The series was produced with no budget, recorded on cameras either owned by the Candle Wasters or donated by their friends, and filmed during the school holidays, over three weeks in January 2014.³⁰

²⁸ A complete playlist of the videos in *NMTD* can be accessed at ‘Nothing Much To Do Story - YouTube’, accessed 9 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgtRIWtmHefNSmhLGzm87bM6AKzWvD-ls>.

²⁹ Elsie Bollinger, Claris Jacobs, and Minnie Grace, ‘How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries’ (National Digital Forum, Te Papa Museum, Wellington, 14 October 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KkiL8Er_98.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

To a far greater extent than most other examples of distributed adaptations, *NMTD* draws its inspiration both from the narrative schema introduced by *LBD* and the user conventions most popular on the many social media sites it employs. Throughout the series, *NMTD* references and reproduces these aesthetics, behaviours and formats, intertwining them with the presentation of its narrative. This serves to blur the boundary between fiction and reality, at once heightening the credibility of the characters by testifying to their proficiency as social media users, and camouflaging the series' fictional content among that posted to the sites by real-world users every day. In turn, this serves to elicit the relational dynamics native to these social media environments, repurposing them for use within a hybridized narrative context wherein the confusion of fiction and reality actually *enhances* the fans' enjoyment of the series. While these fans are likely aware of the series' fictionality, in other words, there remains pleasure to be found in responding to or engaging with the story and its characters *as though* both were real, either by drawing the characters into the real world or oneself into the story world. Using a method of platform-specific textual analysis and the theoretical lens afforded by digital narratology, this thesis investigates the literary adaptation web series *NMTD* specifically in its capacity as a distributed adaptation, exploring the series' purposeful engagement with the behaviours and conventions of popular social media platforms, and investigating the effect of evoking the relationality of these practices within the context of fictional storytelling.

Chapter One – Narrative on YouTube: The Dominance of Lonely Teens

Chapter One charts YouTube's evolution from audio-visual archive to burgeoning content depository, exploring the increased presence of narrative content on the platform. The historical overview it presents is anchored by a focus on the platform's most popular type of user-generated video: the vlog. Acknowledging the changes in vlogging aesthetics and functionality over the past decade, this chapter sketches a history of the form, tracing the antecedents of its fascination with self-documentation from the written diary through to the practice of homecamming popularised in the 1990s. The chapter contends that the enduring popularity of vlogging resides in its capacity to document and narrativize the thoughts and events of one's everyday life. By way of illustration, it discusses at length two early examples of fictional storytelling where vlogging served both as the storytelling medium and the narrative inspiration. The controversial YouTube 'hoaxes' of EmoKid21Ohio and LonelyGirl15 both utilized

the vlog format in order to convey their narratives, adopting the expressive format as a means of foregrounding their protagonists' lived experiences. Curiously, the two texts also engaged with the form's most popular conventions in order to hide their fictionality from the audience. The chapter frames these examples as prototypical 'web series,' a format which has exploded in popularity amidst the increasing digitalization of televisual content and the online migration of audiences. The chapter ends with a discussion of a thematic concern central to both EmoKid21Ohio and LonelyGirl15, true also of the wider platform: the utilization of vlogging as an emotional and social outlet for 'lonely' adolescents.

Chapter Two – Social Media Fictions and Distributed Adaptations

Chapter Two turns to the narrative potential of social media more broadly, adopting adaptation studies as a theoretical lens to better explore the narrative affordances unique to fictions told on social network sites. The chapter begins with an account of the web series *KateModern* (2007-8), using this series to illustrate the three characteristics identified in Eugenia Kuznetsova's conceptualisation of social media fictions: medium-specificity, interactivity and the blurring of fiction and reality.³¹ It then moves to a discussion of the literary adaptation web series, exploring the narrative significance of the vlog format, multi-channel layout and extensive social media footprint adopted by *LBD* in its modernization of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The chapter recognizes the popular characterisation of *LBD* (as well as those series it has since inspired) as transmedia storytelling, a label intended to describe the series' distribution across multiple social media sites. Recounting the history of this popular concept, the chapter considers but ultimately disputes the suitability of this term to literary adaptation web series. In its place, it proposes a new term, *distributed adaptations*, which better acknowledges the conflicted process of orchestrating the adaptation of an individual, well-known story to play out across a number of platforms. The chapter evokes the work of Christy Dena and Jason Mittell to present an alternative narrative schema for literary adaptation web series, acknowledging the imbalanced distribution of narrative information over multiple sources. It ends with a detailed synopsis of *NMTD*, accounting for each of the social media sources employed to convey the series' narrative.

³¹ Kuznetsova, 'Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform', 271.

Chapter Three – Immersed in the Timeline, Part I: YouTube

Chapter Three dedicates attention exclusively to the YouTube videos which form the backbone of *NMTD*'s narrative, exploring their frequent reproduction of video-making conventions popular within the YouTube community. It looks specifically at the main channel for the series, which features a range of popular YouTube formats, including the first vlog, the daily vlog, the room tour, the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag, the 'My First Time' tag and the baking tutorial. The chapter contends that the series' incorporation of these popular video formats, aesthetics and behaviours characterises the protagonists as 'real' and active members of the YouTube community, which in turn enables the series to elicit the same sense of attachment between the characters and the audience that exists between real-world vloggers and their viewers. This argument draws both on Kathleen Stewart's conceptualisation of attachment and Patricia G. Lange's theorization of 'videos of affinity,'³² proposing that the value of using real-world vlogging practices in fictional web series centres on the ability to repurpose the relational dynamics they inspire within a fictional context. The chapter provides close analyses of each of the video formats included in *NMTD*, unpacking their appeal among the wider YouTube community before theorising their effect on audiences' engagement with the series.

Chapter Four – Immersed in the Timeline, Part II: Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr

Chapter Four explores the social media profiles created for the characters of *NMTD* across Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. In accordance with the structural schema proposed in Chapter Two, these profiles are recognized as secondary narrative sources, offering the audience supplementary narrative information which aids their experience of the fiction but is not crucial for comprehending major narrative developments.³³ The chapter begins with an account of the virtual world these profiles situate the characters within, positioning them simultaneously as part of the fictional storyworld and as what Seymour calls 'textual bodies' which exist in the real (online) world of the audience.³⁴ The chapter then defines the two modes of temporal engagement offered to viewers of

³² See Patricia G. Lange, 'Videos of Affinity on YouTube', in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Lithuania: Logotipas, 2009).

³³ See Christy Dena, 'Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling' (Critical Animals Postgraduate Conference, This is Not Art Festival, Newcastle, Australia, 2004), http://www.christydena.com/Docs/DENA_MultichannelPoetics.pdf.

³⁴ Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', 105.

distributed adaptations, variously termed *live* and *retroactive* narrative experiences. It proposes that the characters' social media profiles are most valuable to the live narrative experience because they contribute the impression that the story is unfolding as the audience watches on. This chapter extends the argument advanced in Chapter Three, asserting that the realistic behaviours ascribed to *NMTD*'s characters on their social media profiles have the effect of encouraging audiences to relate to the characters as though they are real people. The chapter proceeds to detail how this blurring of fiction and reality also underscored the creators' efforts to portray the characters as 'micro-celebrities,'³⁵ enabled the characters to 'talk back' to their audience, and cultivated fan communities around the series. The chapter ends with a discussion of the narrative experience afforded by *NMTD*, drawing parallels between the *keitai shōsetsu* (cell-phone novels) popular in Japan, the lexias of hypertext fiction, and the mobile, fragmentary mode of engagement encouraged by the multi-platform structure of *NMTD*, an exemplary distributed narrative.

Conclusion

I conclude this thesis by suggesting that the success of distributed adaptations such as *NMTD* illustrates the pleasure of engaging with texts which are at once overtly fictional and carefully designed to mimic reality. Through their attentive replication of the practices of everyday social media users, and hence their evocation of the real-world relationality invested in these behaviours, distributed adaptations such as *NMTD* are able to foreground what I call *the pleasure of the 'as though,'* inviting the audience to experience and relate to the fiction *as though* it were real. This offers a new contribution to longstanding debates over the intent of media forms predicated on the mimicry of reality, suggesting that audiences are not only capable of but also eager to engage in the layering of fictional content with real practice, enjoying the thrill of experiencing (real) affective responses towards beings and stories they are well aware are fictional.

³⁵ Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 25.

Chapter One

Narrative on YouTube: The Dominance of Lonely Teens

Since its official launch in June 2005, YouTube has irrefutably become the largest video-sharing platform on the web. The site's 'simple, integrated interface within which users [can] upload, publish, and view streaming videos without high levels of technical knowledge'¹ has all but monopolised the video-sharing market, retaining public favour over a host of competing services, including sites such as Vimeo, Hulu and Facebook.² Given YouTube's ongoing success—purportedly achieving a fifty percent increase in aggregate watch time from 2014 to 2015³—it comes as no surprise that the platform has become an increasingly prevalent object of academic inquiry. Dedicated publications such as *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009),⁴ *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (2010),⁵ *Reading YouTube: The Critical Viewers Guide* (2011),⁶ and *The YouTube Reader* (2009)⁷ have each set out to analyse the platform's intricacies, charting the website's shift from 'a personal storage facility for video content to a platform for public self-expression,'⁸ and taking seriously the cultural products produced within it. Despite increasing academic interest, however, there remains much about YouTube yet to be explored. This chapter focuses specifically on YouTube's most prominent and popular form of 'public self-expression,' known as vlogging, exploring how the narrativity of this practice has lent itself to the site's evolution as storytelling platform. Through the close analysis of EmoKid21Ohio and LonelyGirl15, two controversial stories inspired by and told using vlogs, this chapter

¹ Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge & Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2009), 1.

² For a recent screenshot of the online video marketplace, see Todd Spangler, 'YouTube Turns 10: How Competition Crashed the Party', *Variety*, 3 October 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/youtube-10th-anniversary-competitors-hulu-facebook-vimeo-1201448925/>.

³ Janko Roettgers, 'Google Grows YouTube Views, Revenue Despite Facebook Threat', *Variety*, 16 July 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/google-grows-youtube-views-revenue-despite-facebook-threat-1201542013/>.

⁴ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*.

⁵ Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

⁶ Anandam P. Kavoori, *Reading YouTube: The Critical Viewers Guide* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

⁷ Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *The Youtube Reader* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009).

⁸ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 4.

charts YouTube's development as a thriving platform for original fictional content, tracing the introduction of its own storytelling formats alongside the site's continued commitment to amplifying the voices of lonely adolescents.

Vlogs, Camgirls and the Narrative of Everyday Life

A shortened term for 'video blogs,' vlogs are defined by Burgess and Green as 'an *extremely prevalent* form of "amateur" video [o]n YouTube,'⁹ a claim supported by the more than 47,500,000 results which greet a YouTube search for the term at the time of writing. As Jean Burgess and Joshua Green note, a typical vlog is

structured primarily around a monologue delivered directly to camera, characteristically ... produced with little more than a webcam and some witty editing. The subject matter ranges from reasoned political debate to impassioned rants about YouTube itself and the mundane details of everyday life.¹⁰

From YouTube's advent, vlogs recounting one's everyday experiences have figured as the most popular of this video type, particularly among adolescents and young adults.¹¹ Foregrounding the personal, confessional and the intimate, these videos feature individuals speaking directly to a camera about their lives, thoughts and feelings. The practice has long been associated with private, domestic settings, and remains largely inseparable from the iconic image of an individual sitting before and talking to a camera in their bedroom. Though it was not uncommon for earlier vlogging examples to be filmed in single takes, jump-cuts have recently become a defining characteristic of the genre, signalling a widening of vlogs' accepted level of mediation. Easily achieved with simple video-editing software, the presence of jump-cuts indicate a vlogger's conscious removal of embarrassing moments or mistakes; their desire to enhance the pace (or humour) of the video through the removal of empty moments; or their efforts to visually punctuate verbal remarks. While the popularity of this editing technique points to vlogging's ongoing stylistic evolution, it also belies the aesthetic juxtaposition which has come to characterise vlogging as an audio-visual format: amidst the increasing utilization of high-quality video cameras and advantageous lighting in even

⁹ Ibid., 145, footnote 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See Heather Molyneaux et al., 'Exploring the Gender Divide on YouTube: An Analysis of the Creation and Reception of Vlogs', *American Communication Journal* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 1-14; Michael Hoechsmann, 'Audience Incorporated (Inc.): Youth Cultural Production and the New Media', *JCT (Online)* 24, no. 1 (2008): 60-70.

the most basic of user-generated YouTube videos (as will be further discussed in Chapter Three), there remains a commitment to basic editing techniques such as the jump-cut, which reaffirm the amateur ideologies not only at the root of vlogging as a practice, but also of YouTube itself.¹²

Like entries in a diary, vlogs do not exist in isolation. Individuals who upload vlogs to YouTube typically do so in succession—if not on an on-going basis—in effect creating and publishing a documentation of their lives in narrative form. By updating imagined audiences about everyday happenings, personal dramas or momentous events, vlogs form a linear narrative in which the vlogger's life takes centre-stage. Much like diaries, vlogs function as a form of 'everyday storytelling'¹³ perpetually grounded in the present. According to Marie-Laure Ryan,

[t]he diarist lives his life and tells it at the same time, as he recounts in discrete entries the stories of the day past. Tomorrow will not only bring new individual stories, tomorrow will continue a life-story whose end will remain forever unknown to its chronicler.¹⁴

Tobias Raun observes that this sense of unpredictability complicates the 'clear' linearity of vlogging, distinguishing its narrative from other, more distanced forms of self-reflection and –documentation: '[I]f cannot be directed or ordered in the way that is possible in a written autobiography as it is the telling of one's story as one lives it.'¹⁵ Michael Hoechsmann similarly proposes that the expressiveness emblematic of vlogging exaggerates the ephemerality of its narrative: the vlog 'is somewhat stream of consciousness, somewhat disposable content, expressive and in the moment, but redundant and senseless the next.'¹⁶ This position also underlies what Misha Kavka, in relation to reality television, has called a 'zone of liveness,' suggesting that for vlogs, too, '[w]hat has happened after a day or a week is that the [vlog] has become "old news,"

¹² Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 13.

¹³ Markus Kuhn, 'Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics and Self-Reflexive Narration: On the Diversification of Audiovisual Narration on the Internet', in *Beyond Classical Narration: Transmedial and Unnatural Challenges* (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 137.

¹⁴ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Narrative in Real Time: Chronicle, Mimesis and Plot in the Baseball Broadcast', *Narrative* 1, no. 2 (1993): 138–39.

¹⁵ Tobias Raun, 'Video Blogging as a Vehicle of Transformation: Exploring the Intersection Between Trans Identity and Information Technology', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no. 3 (2015): 371.

¹⁶ Hoechsmann, 'Audience Incorporated (Inc.)', 67.

superseded by the next event made-present.¹⁷ Rather than diminishing vlogging's narrative potential, however, this serves to foster a heightened sense of urgency around its reception. Much as Kavka observes that '[h]owever compelling it may have been, it is difficult to go back and watch last month's *Big Brother* episode even if you had not seen it at the time,'¹⁸ vlogging audiences are compelled to stay up-to-date with the videos of their favourite users. Should they fall behind, they risk suffering a less engaging viewing experience, distracted by the knowledge of the content's inconsequentiality in the long-term. It is thus the intimate and confessional qualities most emblematic of vlogging as a form of self-expression which serve to inspire a sense of immediacy around the narrative it creates.

Here, it is worth pausing to consider Henry Jenkins' claim that while '[t]here is much that *is* new about YouTube ... there is also much that is old. YouTube has a history which extends beyond October 2006 when Google purchased YouTube for \$1.65 billion or even June 2005 when the website launched.'¹⁹ In the case of vlogging, the self-publishing 'camgirls' of the mid-1990s to early 2000s undoubtedly figure as a significant and influential antecedent.²⁰ As comprehensively documented by Theresa M. Senft in *Camgirls: Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social Networks* (2008), camgirls were 'women who broadcast themselves over the Web for the general public,'²¹ programming webcams to upload snapshots of their living spaces to their personal websites at regular intervals.²² Predating the ubiquity of webcams, advances in the quality and affordability of image-capturing technologies, and the rise of social networking platforms such as YouTube,²³ the practice of 'homecamming' was most

¹⁷ Misha Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy: Reality Matters* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, "What Happened Before YouTube," in *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge & Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 109, original emphasis.

²⁰ See Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka, "'I Guess A Lot of People See Me as a Big Sister or a Friend': The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers", *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 3 (2017): 311.

²¹ Senft, *Camgirls*, 1.

²² Glen Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama: The Return of the Intimate Screen', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 6 (2011): 596.

²³ See Senft, *Camgirls*, 8-11.

popular around the turn of the twenty-first century, when the most heavily viewed camgirls were purportedly attracting millions of hits per day.²⁴

Like vlogging, homecamming is a practice preoccupied with documenting the lives of those in front of the camera. As Creeber summarises, its fascination lies in 'ordinary people [being] filmed in real time, in everyday habitats and [being] viewed through aesthetically diminished images.'²⁵ The primary difference between homecamming and vlogging, however, rests in the disparity between homecamming's low-quality photography and variable refresh intervals, and vlogging's increasingly high-quality audio-visual format. The affordances of each medium directly influence the style of narrative each is able to present. As Senft observes, '[b]ecause a webcam presents a series of still pictures rather than a moving image, the narrative [of homecamming] is necessarily ambiguous and incomplete.'²⁶ She cites an anecdote by popular camgirl Ana Voog as an example 'of the disjuncture between image, action, and intent'²⁷ which may occur in the creation of homecamming narratives:

Okay, I am sitting on my couch, in tears. I have a horrible migraine, and the pain is getting worse. My boyfriend Jason comes into the apartment and asks me what is wrong. I tell him about my headache and he goes to the pharmacy to get medicine for me. I sit on the couch, crying, with my stereo playing in the background ... Ten minutes later, I check my email, and there are twenty messages telling me how horrible my boyfriend is to make me cry and then walk out on me, and how they'd never treat me that way.²⁸

Such an example draws attention to the augmented role of the audience in the reception of this medium. Because the photographs from camgirls' webcams were uploaded periodically, with intervals ranging anywhere from 30 seconds to five minutes,²⁹ the audience were forced to construct their own narrative, bridging the temporal gaps between each photo with their own assumptions, expectations and fantasies. This necessarily placed heightened demands on the audiences' attentiveness (recognizing new updates and noting the differences between photographs), as well as their capacity

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

²⁵ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 597.

²⁶ Senft, *Camgirls*, 18-19.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ Ana Voog, quoted in *ibid.*

²⁹ Senft, *Camgirls*, 18.

to critically engage with the photographs sequentially, interpreting and conceiving of a plausible narrative to connect them. Of course, relying so heavily on audience reception inevitably leaves the narrative open to dramatic variation, with each viewer capable of constructing an entirely unique version of events. In situations akin to that Ana Voog describes above, wherein a disconnect occurs between the camgirl's lived reality and the narrative/s manufactured by her viewers, the subjectivity of this process is made all the more apparent; as Voog observes, '[M]y cams aren't about me—they are about YOU. What are you feeling today, that you saw that series of images and made those connections?'³⁰

By contrast, vlogging's audio-visual format presents significantly less opportunity for misinterpretation. Though its narrative similarly emerges from the accumulation of content over time, the emphasis shifts from interpretation to presentation, with each video serving as a new addition to an overarching life narrative, much like episodes in a television series. Indeed, the affinity between these serial narrative forms was recognized early in YouTube's history, popularised by two controversial examples of fictional storytelling for which vlogging served both as the medium of expression and the narrative inspiration.

The Life and Death of EmoKid21Ohio

It was the little-known (though highly contentious) EmoKid21Ohio saga which perhaps first highlighted vlogging's propensity for fictional narrativisation.³¹ On 3 April 2006, EmoKid21Ohio uploaded his first YouTube video, "My First Video Blog," where, pointedly avoiding looking at the camera, he introduced himself: 'Hey, my name is Matt. This is my first video blog. Ummm, I don't really know what to say—I've never done a video blog before—but, y'know, I'm just giving it a go, seeing if I like it or not.'³² Sporting a dark grey hoodie and leaning his head disinterestedly against his hand, Matt addresses the camera in a slow, monotonous drawl further accentuated by the video's marked lack of cuts. The video is filmed in his bedroom, shot in 240px by a digital camera held in

³⁰ Ana Voog, quoted in *ibid.*, 19.

³¹ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 579.

³² EmoKid21Ohio, *My First Video Blog*, accessed 9 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zflhW8zOu8.

Matt's right hand. He introduces himself as a college student and music fan from 'Clevie' (Cleveland, Ohio), before attempting to define his self-ascribed 'emo' label:

... um, there are a lot of kids out there... like, especially at my college, and they're always like, "Oh my God, you emo kids, you don't even know what emo is." Oh my God, seriously, we do, okay? It's not like a *phase*. Emo isn't, you know... we [don't] do it because our friends do it, that's not why we do it, man. Emo is from the *heart*, okay? It's from the heart.³³

As Creeber notes, Matt's 'whiny, self-obsessed and painfully earnest'³⁴ vlogging style instantly attracted the attention of the YouTube community. So as to address this enthusiastic reception, Matt begins his second video by announcing that he wants to 'say a few words to some of the comments and some of the videos in reply [sic] to mine.'³⁵ After thanking another vlogger, Stanley22UK, for being 'really nice' in his video response, Matt quickly changes tack, retaliating against the authors of the many negative comments he received: 'When you guys, y'know, you're mean and say things about, y'know, "Emo's gay," and, y'know, "Who the hell are Thursday?" and "Thursday are gay," that's not cool, okay? That's who I am and when you're mean about that, you're mean about my personality.'³⁶ Unsurprisingly, the sensitivity and vulnerability Matt exhibited in his early videos marked him as an easy target for online 'hate,' an outpouring of which he continued to receive in the form of video comments, personal messages and even a dedicated hate thread on the thesuperficial.com forums.³⁷

However, not all of the responses to Matt's videos were negative. A day after posting his first video, Matt received a video response from Amy, a young woman who was so inspired by Matt's videos that she created her own channel under the moniker Emogirl21.³⁸ In her first video, Amy reads a poem she has written entitled 'Self-Worth,'

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 598.

³⁵ EmoKid21Ohio, *My Second Video Blog*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDbbwdfR8Fc&feature=youtu.be>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Matt uploaded a number of videos documenting (and directly responding to) his 'haters', including: EmoKid21Ohio, *I've Had It. I'm so Mad.*, accessed 12 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuFjKZKhp_U; EmoKid21Ohio, *To the Superficial.com MORONS*, accessed 12 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfaK-2uIxyM>; EmoKid21Ohio, *Comments I've Been Getting*, accessed 12 April 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_beOsMMoLk&nohtml5.

³⁸ EmoGirl21, *My Video Blog*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INTcjh0S2Zo>.

recounting the heartbreak and betrayal of a past abusive relationship. Her video immediately caught Matt's attention,³⁹ and as Creeber describes it, '[w]hat unfolded, over the course of a month, was an unlikely love story between the two.'⁴⁰ Connecting through their videos and cultivating their spark off-camera over MSN Messenger, Matt and Amy began a whirlwind online courtship.

Unfortunately, their relationship did not last long. Despite valiant efforts to defend both himself and Amy from the slew of abusive comments their videos persistently attracted, Matt was soon devastated by the knowledge that Emogirl21 had actually been 'leading [him] on.'⁴¹ The videos Matt posted over the next four days each documented his coming to terms with Amy's betrayal,⁴² and eventually showed him accepting her public (poetic) apology.⁴³ As this drama unfolded, 'thousands of people ... tune[d] into YouTube to watch.'⁴⁴ Matt's and Amy's videos quickly became some of the most discussed on YouTube, and Matt was even approached by mainstream media outlets such as mtvU and CBS to discuss his newfound fame, as well as the bullying to which he was subjected in response.⁴⁵

After reconciling with Emogirl21, Matt continued to upload vlogs, updating his viewers about his trip to Illinois, a disagreement with his flatmate, and the rumours which were circulating about him actually being British. Then, quite suddenly, Matt disappeared. One week later, on 24 April 2006, matching videos were posted on Matt's and Amy's YouTube channels, respectively declaring the 'deaths' of EmoKid21Ohio and Emogirl21. The videos took the form of news bulletins, opening with title graphics from *BBC News* and featuring strangers in casual clothing as presenters. In their opening address, these fake newscasters claimed that Matt had been 'brutally murdered' by a

³⁹ EmoKid21Ohio, *MTVu, Forgiving Emo Girl*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWq9F2w88Cw>.

⁴⁰ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 598.

⁴¹ EmoKid21Ohio, *Angry Message to EmoGirl21*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRGv3vjTEr0>.

⁴² EmoKid21Ohio, *How I'm Feeling after Everything That's Happened*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G17dn5wyvN4&feature=youtu.be>.

⁴³ EmoKid21Ohio, *MTVu, Forgiving Emo Girl*; Emogirl21, *To Emokid21Ohio*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4NvDcdGmEI>.

⁴⁴ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 598.

⁴⁵ EmoKid21Ohio, *MTVu, Forgiving Emo Girl*; Deborah Netburn, 'The Strange Web Saga of Emokid21', *Los Angeles Times*, 2006, Accessed at <http://alissabrooke.proboards.com/thread/1727/emokid21ohio>.

‘Sword of Truth’ outside his home,⁴⁶ and that Amy, in response, had decided ‘she just couldn’t carry on anymore and ended it all.’⁴⁷ The announcement of EmoKid’s death was followed by a clip of Matt in his bedroom, speaking to his camera with a British accent:

Hello, uh, it’s me, Matt, again. As you can probably tell, um, I’m not an emo kid from Ohio. Um, I thought it’d be amusing to masquerade as one, um, but unfortunately somebody—yesterday or the day before, I can’t remember which—found my real MySpace profile, so I can’t... [Laughs] I tried, um, very, very, very hard to think up an explanation for it, but I have none, so I’m going to have to come clean.⁴⁸

His video ended with an ironic apology: ‘Dreadfully sorry, and may Matt rest in peace, and forever in our hearts.’⁴⁹ As Creeber recalls, the subsequent media coverage revealed that Emokid21Ohio ‘was not actually an American teenager at all but Benjamin Castelow Johnson, a 22-year-old English college student from Rugby in the UK.’⁵⁰ Matt’s first ‘really nice’ responder Stanley22UK and Emogirl21 were also revealed to be in on the ruse, both real-life friends of Johnson who had been recruited to help flesh out the EmoKid narrative.⁵¹ The hoax attracted a variety of responses from the YouTube community. In the more than 800 comments on the “The Death of EmoKid21Ohio” video at the time of writing, amidst the many spiteful comments (likely all the more enraged because their authors were duped), a large number commend the ingenuity and humour of the EmoKid farce. One user writes: ‘My God! I knew something was always fishy! People always talking about you, making videos about you, supporting you sometimes xD OMG THIS IS GREAT! You have possibly become one of the best internet prankster [sic] ever.’ Another shares the sentiment, commenting: ‘You and EmoGirl were a historical and hysterical experience for many of us. You took video blogging and the human experience on the internet to a new level. Sorry it ended so soon.’ Following the revelation of his true identity, a handful of videos featuring Johnson in-character as

⁴⁶ EmoKid21Ohio, *The Death Of EmoKid21Ohio*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ8ISb6lkLA>.

⁴⁷ EmoGirl21, *The Death of Emogirl*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhnNjiGcVdY>.

⁴⁸ EmoKid21Ohio, *The Death Of EmoKid21Ohio*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Creeber, ‘It’s Not TV, It’s Online Drama’, 598.

⁵¹ EmoKid21Ohio, *The Death Of EmoKid21Ohio*; EmoGirl21, *The Death of Emogirl*.

Matt have been uploaded to the EmoKid21Ohio YouTube channel,⁵² but as ‘Matt’ recently commented on one of his videos, he has no immediate plans to return to YouTube (see Figure 1).

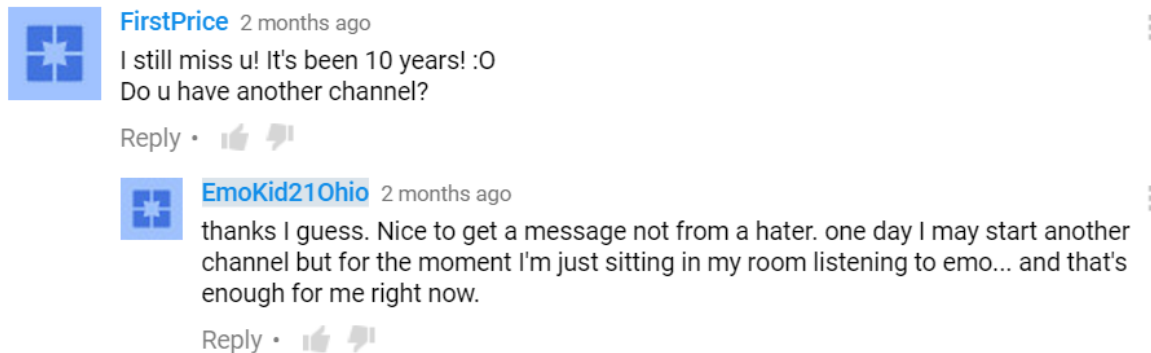


Figure 1. EmoKid21Ohio continues his legacy ten years on. Comment posted on “The Death of EmoKid21Ohio” in February 2016. Accessed 18/3/16.
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ8ISb6lkLA>.

Played out during April 2006, EmoKid21Ohio is one of the earliest examples of a fictional narrative which drew inspiration from contemporary vlogging practices.⁵³ Centring upon a protagonist whose emotional vulnerability paired seamlessly with the confessional quality characteristic of the form, Matt’s videos were both aesthetically and thematically reminiscent of those uploaded to YouTube by real users every day. However, Matt’s vlogs were quickly set apart from those they were designed to disguise among. By exceeding the level of emotional sensitivity deemed acceptable by others on the site, Matt immediately provoked a barrage of negative attention, and was inundated with hateful reactions to his videos in the form of text comments, video responses and private messages. While the introduction of a romantic interest undoubtedly enhanced the intrigue surrounding Matt’s online presence, the narrative of EmoKid21Ohio predominantly relied on the interactivity afforded by the site’s interface, which facilitated a feedback loop wherein Matt could emotively respond to his viewers’ responses (and their responses to his responses, and so forth). Early in YouTube’s history, therefore, EmoKid21Ohio not only realized the fictional potential of the vlog

⁵² The majority of these videos are unlisted but are accessible via hyperlinks posted on Emokid21Ohio’s official Twitter page. See ‘Matt (@emokid21ohio) | Twitter’, accessed 12 April 2016, <https://twitter.com/emokid21ohio>.

⁵³ Creeber, ‘It’s Not TV, It’s Online Drama’, 598.

format, but also paved the way for a new generation of online narratives by embracing the affordances of YouTube's interface to enhance the series' storytelling efforts.

The Curious Case of LonelyGirl15

Just three months after EmoKid21Ohio's rise to fame, another controversy rocked the YouTube community. As in the case of EmoKid21Ohio, it began with the upload of a seemingly innocent vlog – this time by a shy sixteen-year-old named Bree, better known by her online moniker, LonelyGirl15. Predominantly filmed using a webcam in her bedroom, Bree's 'videos were impassioned – they described a fraught relationship with her religious parents and played out the quandaries and capriciousness of her relationship with friend and fellow vlogger Daniel.'⁵⁴ Bree quickly became a YouTube sensation. Her clips routinely featured in the Most Viewed and Most Discussed sections on the YouTube homepage and purportedly broke 'some click- and visitor-records in the year of 2006.'⁵⁵

However, this popularity derived at least in part from widespread debates about Bree's authenticity, with speculation rife about whether LonelyGirl15's videos were 'real.'⁵⁶ Burgess and Green explain that, although Bree's videos

fit the vlogging mould - a talking head speaking straight-to-camera, and covered the domestic, personal politics considered characteristic of the form, some of them looked "too slick." They were a little too well edited, and as a series, revealed a series of events that unfolded a little too much like a narrative for a personal journal.⁵⁷

According to Senft, 'skeptics [also] found it difficult to swallow the idea that a child with "strict religious parents" who was routinely confined to her room also had access to a camera and computer with which to regularly update a personal video site.'⁵⁸ It was not long before these suspicions were confirmed. Almost four months after Bree uploaded her first video, a post by 'The Creators' appeared on the LonelyGirl15 discussion forums, thanking Bree's 'incredible fans' and expressing their gratitude for the 'overwhelmingly

⁵⁴ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 27–28.

⁵⁵ Kuhn, 'Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics', 140.

⁵⁶ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 28; Richard Rushfield and Claire Hoffman, 'Mystery Fuels Huge Popularity of Web's Lonelygirl15', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 September 2006, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/sep/08/entertainment/et-lonelygirl8>.

⁵⁷ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*.

⁵⁸ Senft, *Camgirls*, 29.

positive response to her videos.’⁵⁹ The post revealed that ‘Bree was a fictional character, embodied by the 19-year-old actress Jessica Rose’ and that LonelyGirl15 had been ‘scripted and staged’ by three experimental filmmakers: Miles Beckett, Mesh Flinders and Greg Goodfried.⁶⁰ Reportedly, Bree’s story had been originally intended ‘as an early run for what would eventually become a Hollywood movie.’⁶¹

Interestingly, in spite of this revelation, LonelyGirl15’s fan-base continued to grow, with long-standing and new audiences alike investing themselves in the dramatic developments of Bree’s (now verifiably) fictional world.⁶² The creators continued to produce LonelyGirl15’s story, emboldened by the public’s knowledge of its fictionality to add ‘more action and more suspenseful events ... more violence and more mystery’ than was allowed by the original realistic vlog style.⁶³ In all, LonelyGirl15 ran for three seasons, totalling over 560 episodes.⁶⁴ At the time of writing, Bree’s YouTube channel retains over 140,000 subscribers and boasts more than 295,000,000 total views, testifying to the show’s incredible success. Recently, Bree was introduced to a new generation of YouTube users through a Fine Brothers’ ‘YouTubers React’ video created about the controversy,⁶⁵ and has sparked renewed fan intrigue from the release of a number of new videos set in the LG15 universe celebrating the series’ ten year anniversary.⁶⁶

To a far larger audience than EmoKid21Ohio, LonelyGirl15 revealed the storytelling capacity of the vlogging format. Indeed, in the forum post confirming Bree’s fictionality, the show’s creators wrote that their intention for LonelyGirl15 was ‘to tell a story – [a] story that could only be told using the medium of video blogs and the distribution power of the internet. A story that [was] interactive and constantly

⁵⁹ ‘A Message From the Creators’, *Lonelygirl15*, 7 September 2006, <http://www.lg15.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=36&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0&sid=c2fbcf8051c04a501bcd8acc35692dd4>.

⁶⁰ Kuhn, ‘Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics’, 141.

⁶¹ Senft, *Camgirls*, 29.

⁶² Creeber, ‘It’s Not TV, It’s Online Drama’, 602.

⁶³ Kuhn, ‘Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics’, 142.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Fine Brothers Entertainment, *YOUTUBERS REACT TO LONELYGIRL15*, accessed 28 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhJLjaCt1DM>.

⁶⁶ For more information, see ‘LG15: Anchor Cove - LGPedia’, accessed 2 February 2017, http://www.lg15.com/lgpedia/index.php?title=Portal:LG15:_Anchor_Cove.

evolving with the audience.⁶⁷ Drawing attention to the significance of the vlog format for LonelyGirl15's narrative, the creators emphasised that it was *only* by engaging with the style and behaviours of 'the medium of video blogs' that they felt capable of telling Bree's story.⁶⁸ Underlying this proclamation is the notion upon which LonelyGirl15's production, circulation and reception relied: the successful blurring of fiction and reality. Though debates about LonelyGirl15's authenticity began almost immediately after Bree uploaded her first video, the length and passion which characterised them was due in large part to the LonelyGirl15 videos' attentive replication (and recirculation) of popular vlogging aesthetics, and the façade of authenticity thereby lent to Bree's videos and their narrative. For Creeber, the fact that many of Bree's 'audience initially believed her to be a real vlogger ... was not surprising as [her] videos were deliberately made to resemble thousands of others.'⁶⁹ Burgess and Green similarly observe that LonelyGirl15's videos '[s]killfully appropriat[ed] the aesthetics and formal constraints of the vlog and its confessional style,'⁷⁰ including the low-quality webcam footage, bedroom setting, rudimentary editing effects and earnest first-person address characteristic of YouTube vlogging at the time. As in the case of EmoKid21Ohio, the similarity of Bree's videos to the many authentic others uploaded daily to YouTube helped to obscure (at least for a time) LonelyGirl15's fictional premise. Indeed, if it wasn't for the barrage of attention Bree's vlogs quickly (and inexplicably) received, her videos may well have been lost in the crowd.

In addition to their aesthetic similarity, LonelyGirl15's videos also gained credibility from her creators' purposeful engagement with YouTube's social networking ethos. As Creeber observes, LonelyGirl15's creators were enthusiastic about instigating relationships between Bree and other YouTube vloggers, often mentioning the usernames of or including direct responses to other YouTubers in her videos.⁷¹ This is exemplified in "First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails," where Bree frames her decision to start vlogging as the result of her admiration for other members of the vlogging community:

⁶⁷ 'A Message From the Creators'.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 599.

⁷⁰ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 28.

⁷¹ Creeber, 'It's Not TV, It's Online Drama', 599.

Hi guys, um, so this is my first video blog. Umm, I've been watching for a while, and I really like a lot of you guys on here. Um, I really like paytotheorderofof2 – you – she – you're really funny and, um, your videos are always really interesting. You seem really nice. Um, then there's TheWineKone – or just WineKone, I'm not sure - um, you are *totally* retarded but I like it.⁷²

Here, albeit switching uncertainly between third- and first-person pronouns, Bree begins her first vlog by direct addressing the popular YouTubers paytotheorderofof2 and TheWineKone. Much as Burgess and Green note that vlogging 'is a form whose persistent direct address to the viewer inherently invites feedback,'⁷³ Bree's dialogue from the outset attempts to solicit a response from her audience, encouraging them to harness the interactive components of the site's interface (such as text comments or video responses) in order to talk back to her. LonelyGirl15's creators thus open the series with an invitation for other (in this case high-profile) YouTubers to directly engage with their protagonist, both introducing the interactivity which would become a core component of the LonelyGirl15 narrative and disguising its fabrication through the replication of social behaviours normalised within the YouTube community.

Burgess and Green offer a slightly different perspective on the role of social-networking in LonelyGirl15, focussing their analysis on the elaborate multi-channel network curated by its creators to tell Bree's story. Like EmoKid21Ohio, which instigated a dialogic relationship between Matt's and Amy's videos, the narrative of LonelyGirl15 was not confined to just one YouTube channel. Although, as the primary protagonist, Bree's channel was undoubtedly utilized the most, the series' first season involved a total of seven different YouTube accounts (LonelyGirl15, Danielbeast, gemmers19, jonastko, soccerstar4ever, LAlabrat and hymnofone), five of which belonged to other adolescent characters committed to protecting Bree from the ominous religious organisation known as The Order. As Burgess and Green explain, LonelyGirl15's multi-channel network served a double function, 'mark[ing] the videos as authentic' through the characters' 'apparent use of YouTube to create and negotiate social relationships with other participants as the social network,' whilst also influencing the stylistic dynamics of the narrative these channels were employed to

⁷² lonelygirl15, *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*, accessed 10 April 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-goXKtd6cPo&nohtml5=False>.

⁷³ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 54.

present.⁷⁴ Throughout the series, vlogging functioned as the primary medium of communication among the tightly-knit network of LonelyGirl15 characters, serving as the main method by which they were able to provide each other (and hence the audience) with new information.⁷⁵ Consequently, fans of the LG15 universe were driven to keep up-to-date with all of the characters' channels, for doing so was the most effective means of keeping abreast of the series' narrative developments.

In this respect, the multi-channel layout of LonelyGirl15 not only recognized the significance of social networking for YouTube's users, further aiding the videos' assimilation amidst those already circulating within the YouTube community. It also directly informed the dynamics of the narrative, illustrated both in the centrality of *character* to the unfolding drama (a consequence of the subjectivity inherent to YouTube vlogging), and the attentive style of reception this layout demanded of its audience, tasking them with piecing together a plot distributed across various channels. In effect, the creators' commitment to reproducing the vlogging aesthetics and social behaviours popular among YouTube users forced the LonelyGirl15 narrative to similarly operate within these confines, demanding that the story itself evoke the confessional, interactive and networked qualities characteristic of YouTube as a social networking platform. What is apparent in hindsight is that the immense popularity of LonelyGirl15, as well as the success of its execution, played a crucial role in YouTube's development as an online storytelling platform. While the notoriety of Bree's story drew widespread attention to the site's capacity to host fictional narratives, it also introduced a range of 'new possibilities for experimenting with and expanding the uses of the vlog form within YouTube.'⁷⁶

YouTube: Home of the Lonely Teen

In light of the parallel efforts of both LonelyGirl15 and EmoKid21Ohio to hide their fictionality from their audiences, it is revealing that both texts centre upon adolescent protagonists whose loneliness is not only established from the series' outset, but is also framed as the primary motivation for their vlogging efforts. In Bree's first video, for instance, she comments on the uneventfulness of her small town life. 'What you need to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 28–29.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

know about my town,' she muses, 'is that's it's really boring. Like, *really* boring. Really, *really* boring. Um... That's probably why I spend so much time on my computer.'⁷⁷ As we quickly learn, Bree's homeschooling and the strict rules imposed by her overprotective parents leave little opportunity for establishing friendships with others her age. Instead, Bree spends most of her time alone in her bedroom, kept company by her soft toys and occasional visits from her best (and only) friend Daniel. For Bree, vlogging affords a means by which she can satisfy her desire for social interactions and experiences lacking in her offline world. Time and again, Bree takes to her webcam to express her frustrations with her parents,⁷⁸ her confusion about her relationship with Daniel,⁷⁹ and her excitement about new knowledge she has discovered⁸⁰—precisely because there is no-one else to whom she is able to turn. Likewise, in the EmoKid21Ohio videos, Matt's loneliness is made explicit from the outset. In his third vlog, Matt confides to his viewers his sense of emotional isolation from those around him:

Down at my college, there are a lot of kids and they don't really *understand* me. Y'know, they don't... they don't see me for *who I am*, so... I guess that was one of the reasons I want to do this video blog, is just, y'know, get myself *out there*, and, y'know, just... just make new friends, I suppose.⁸¹

In this case, it is Matt's struggles to find others who understand or similarly relate to his 'emo' identity which prompts him to start making videos, characterising his vlogging efforts as a way of attracting the attention of those further afield who share his interests and emotional outlook. Much like Bree, Matt's reason for vlogging is an attempt to locate and create new friendships and support networks which are otherwise unavailable to him in the 'real world.'

By drawing attention to the social and emotional isolation of their protagonists, both LonelyGirl15 and EmoKid21Ohio evoke the archetype of the 'lonely teen' and offer this characterisation as a means of justifying the format, as well as disguising the

⁷⁷ lonelygirl15, *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*.

⁷⁸ lonelygirl15, *My Parents Suck...*, accessed 24 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll9xv69oX0s>.

⁷⁹ lonelygirl15, *Boy Problems...*, accessed 24 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnYgQJud2Vk>.

⁸⁰ lonelygirl15, *School Work in Summer... BLECHH!!!*, accessed 24 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLqCM16i6QY>.

⁸¹ EmoKid21Ohio, *My Third Video Blog*, accessed 3 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwMH-9zU35A>.

fictionality of their vlog fictions. Providing a snapshot of the YouTube landscape circa 2006, Bree's and Matt's parallel characterisations reveal that lonesome adolescents were so ubiquitous within the vlogging community that modelling fictitious characters on their image was an effective way of blending a fiction in with the real crowd. So too does the pair's emotional vulnerability attest to widespread recognition of vlogging's capacity to connect individuals with new support networks. Indeed, as I have detailed elsewhere, the confessional, intimate address emblematic of the vlogging form marks it as a prime outlet for emotional expression.⁸² Such emotive displays enter into an economy of affective labour, wherein the public revelation of the vlogger's thoughts, feelings and vulnerabilities is exchanged for the support and guidance of sympathetic others.⁸³ In other words, what is promised in return for revelatory vlogging content is the formation of what we might call *communities of belonging* around the vlogger, situating them at the epicentre of a support network which validates and legitimizes their thoughts and feelings. It is through mimicry of these real communities of belonging that Bree and Matt were able to appear as real vloggers. Curiously, however, as we shall see, more recent attempts to insert overtly fictional characters within these support networks have also proven successful, attracting communities of users whose compassion and sympathy for the characters' lives and plights are real, even if those they bestow these affections upon are not.

From Box to Browser: Introducing the Web Series

In the decade since EmoKid21Ohio and LonelyGirl15 dominated the attention and fascination of the YouTube community, the presence of original serial narratives across the site has expanded exponentially. Drawing on the short-form, serial format popularised by these early vlog fictions, examples of this style of online storytelling have come to be known as 'web series,' broadly defined by Markus Kuhn as 'audiovisual forms on the Internet that are serial, fictional, and have the basic structures of a narrative.'⁸⁴

⁸² Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka, 'Crying on YouTube: Vlogs, Self-Exposure and the Productivity of Negative Affect', forthcoming.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Kuhn, 'Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics', 143.

In a list of the form's common characteristics, Kuhn first observes that web series' episodes are 'hardly ever longer than 15 minutes,' most commonly ranging from three to ten.⁸⁵ Due to this condensed temporality, web series must exhibit what Max Dawson has elsewhere described as an 'aesthetic of efficiency.'⁸⁶ As Kuhn notes, '[d]ue to the minor length of the episodes ... a high density of information must be provided within very short time slots. This makes for a remarkable economy of narrative mediation. One episode contains only a few scenes that usually have a great tellability and/or eventfulness.'⁸⁷ Kuhn also points out that web series regularly abbreviate the presentational markers quintessential to the television industry, often featuring a 'digital water mark, a short prefix or a reduced form of front credits known from TV series,' and thus making explicit the televisual influence on their episodic format.⁸⁸ The final requirement, of course, is that web series are primarily and purposefully conceived for publication on digital platforms. Kuhn observes that this often informs the visual style of the content, with close-range cinematography serving as an indication that web series are made 'for viewing on a small screen—e.g. a small window embedded on a website or the display of a smart-phone or a tablet computer.'⁸⁹

Historically speaking, the popularity of web series can be seen to intersect with a number of important shifts within the television industry,⁹⁰ not the least of which is the increasing digitalization of television content. Encouraged by growing audience demand for content easily accessed online, it is now common practice for television networks to curate their own online archives, uploading recently-aired programming which audiences may stream or download.⁹¹ So too has the expansive reach of subscription-

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁶ Max Dawson, 'Television's Aesthetic of Efficiency: Convergence Television and the Digital Short', in *Television as Digital Media*, ed. James Bennett and Niki Strange (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 206.

⁸⁷ Kuhn, 'Web Series between User-Generated Aesthetics', 145.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁰ Though there is not room to recount them here, the popularity of the 'webisode' format in the mid-2000s, and the alluring outlet presented by online platforms for creatives disenfranchised by the 2007 Writers Guild of America strike also figured as prominent influences on the emergence of the web series genre. For more information on these developments, respectively, see Dawson, 'Television's Aesthetic of Efficiency'; Tama Leaver, 'Joss Whedon, Dr. Horrible, and the Future of Web Media', *Popular Communication* 11, no. 2 (2013): 160–73.

⁹¹ For more detailed and historicized accounts of these developments, see Dawson, 'Television's Aesthetic of Efficiency'; Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, 2nd ed. (New York: New

based streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu contributed to the normalization of digitalized television content, introducing new viewing behaviours and heralding increased interest in the value of original programming designed specifically for online distribution.⁹²

At the time of writing, it is YouTube which figures as the web's most popular aggregator of original web series, likely due to the platform's user-friendly interface, prolific viewership, and the ease with which it enables individuals to freely share and circulate their own audio-visual content.⁹³ Indeed, YouTube has recently made explicit its own investment in the storytelling form by commissioning a multitude of original web series for its paid subscription service YouTube Red,⁹⁴ and adding the ability for content creators to easily signpost (and organize) their videos as episodes in a web series as of January 2017. Though many of the web series YouTube hosts feature more traditional styles of cinematography and modes of narration, since the release of EmoKid21Ohio and LonelyGirl15, fictional storytellers across the site have retained an interest in web series expressed in vlog format. As of late, the platform has borne witness to a shift away from texts which seek to hide the fabrication of their storylines behind a veneer of (vlogging) authenticity, to the emergence of a new canon of web series which more overtly acknowledge the fictionality of the narratives they tell within a vlogging frame(work). In these texts, vlogging's narrativity is adopted as the basis for a hybridized form of digital storytelling in which the audience's pleasure derives from the confusion of fictional content and real practices—a quality also true of the expanding online catalogue of social media adaptations.

York University Press, 2014); William Uricchio, 'The Future of a Medium Once Known as Television', in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Lithuania: Logotipas, 2009), 26.

⁹² See Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*.

⁹³ Jin Kim, 'The Institutionalization of YouTube: From User-Generated Content to Professionally Generated Content', *Media, Culture & Society* 34, no. 1 (2012): 57.

⁹⁴ 'YouTube Red Originals - YouTube', accessed 10 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/YouTubeRedOriginals>.

Chapter Two

Social Media Fictions and Distributed Adaptations

With its overwhelming emphasis on classic works of literature adapted to film, the field of adaptation studies has only recently expanded to consider examples of adaptations which include other mediums. During the past decade in particular, scholars have broadened their scope to examine adapted Broadway musicals, video games, theme parks and the like.¹ However, little attention has thus far been directed to the cross-medium adaptation of stories onto social media, despite the many examples of this particular direction of textual transformation. One might consider, for instance, the ‘recreation’ of Quentin Tarantino’s 1992 film *Reservoir Dogs* by the Twitter account @ReservoirDogs_, where scene descriptions are entwined with tweets of dialogue from fifteen character accounts to produce a chronologically-arranged transcription of the film that spans over 1,000 tweets.² So, too, can one find on YouTube a choose-your-own-adventure style adaptation of the pilot episode of *Freaks & Geeks* (1999-2000) where, animating the television series as pixel art, users have the opportunity to ‘play through’ the pilot as either of the show’s eponymous cliques.³ Alternatively, one may choose to follow the *Dracublog* (2005—), an ongoing blog project which annually posts the journal entries and letters comprising Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) on the dates corresponding to their composition in the novel.⁴

By far the most popular illustration of this style of adaptation, however, is what has come to be known as the *literary adaptation web series* or the *literary-inspired web series*: a genre of web series which borrows the narratives, characters and morals of classic works of literature, and modernizes them to fit contemporary settings and platforms. Reminiscent of films such as *Clueless* (1995), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *She’s the Man* (2006), which similarly transpose literary classics into the

¹ For an overview of the recent developments in adaptation studies, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2013).

² ‘Reservoir Dogs (@ReservoirDogs_) | Twitter’, accessed 22 August 2016, https://twitter.com/reservoirdogs_.

³ Fine Brothers Entertainment, *FREAKS & GEEKS INTERACTIVE GAME*, accessed 22 August 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9TG2ljvblA>.

⁴ Bryan Alexander, ‘Dracula Blogged’, accessed 22 August 2016, <http://infocult.typepad.com/dracula/>.

present day and modern vernacular,⁵ what distinguishes these web series is their online distribution, serialized format and, most significantly, their use of vlogging as a storytelling device. Reminiscent of early web texts such as LonelyGirl15 and EmoKid21Ohio, the protagonists of literary adaptation web series are typically characterised as vloggers, justifying the narrative's presentation in vlog format. In the wake of the immensely successful *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-3), a literary adaptation web series based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), this genre has expanded significantly to include examples such as *Nothing Much to Do* (2014), based on William Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* (1612); *The New Adventures of Peter and Wendy* (2014) based on J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904); *Green Gables Fables* (2013) based on L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series (1908-39); *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* (2013) based on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847); and *The Cate Morland Chronicles* (2016) based on Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), to name but a few examples.⁶

By adapting what Ellis calls 'tried and trusted'⁷ narratives from literature and theatre to social media frameworks, literary adaptation web series necessarily refocus adaptation studies' interest in medium-specificity to the narrative capabilities of web-based platforms. Indeed, as Ruth Page observes, '[t]he rise of social-media genres such as blogs, wikis, and social-networked sites as mainstream channels for online communication is well documented, suggesting the potential for the social-media genres of the contemporary Internet to reproduce and reconfigure offline genres of storytelling.'⁸ Page's notion of 'reconfiguring' is of central interest here, owing to the medium-specificity implicitly involved in this process of transformation. Within the context of adaptation, to 'reconfigure' suggests the re-arranging or re-adjusting of a story to better align it with the unique affordances of a new medium.⁹

⁵ For a historical account of the rising popularity of Shakespearean modernisations during the 1990s, see Douglas Lanier, 'Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital', *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 104–13.

⁶ See also Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media'.

⁷ John Ellis, quoted in Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 5.

⁸ Page, 'Seriality and Storytelling in Social Media', 35–36.

⁹ See also Barbara Straumann, 'Adaptation – Remediation – Transmediality', in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, ed. Gabriele Rippl (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 251.

This chapter will work towards expanding the notion of reconfiguration specifically in relation to social media adaptations. To begin, it will consider what it means to author fictional stories for and host stories on social media platforms, looking to an early example of online storytelling, the web series *KateModern* (2007-8), as a means of detailing the unique tools available to authors of so-called 'social media fictions.'¹⁰ It will then turn to a close analysis of the most popular and commercially successful social media adaptation to date, the originator of the literary adaptation web series genre, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (henceforth *LBD*). Introducing a style of social media adaptation previously unseen, the creators of *LBD* spread their modernization of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* across multiple social network sites. Instead of creating disparate points of entry into a sprawling fictional universe, as in the cross-medium structures which have all but dominated the interest of narratologists over the past three decades,¹¹ *LBD* drew upon a range of social media platforms in order to tell a *single* story, at once balancing the innovative storytelling techniques afforded by digital media with the adaptive parameters dictated by the reputation of Austen's nineteenth-century novel. Exploring the narrative schemas proposed by media theorists such as Henry Jenkins, Christy Dena and Jason Mittell, this chapter will introduce a narratological framework that better articulates the complexities of the distributed platform narrative advanced by *LBD*, paying particular attention to the adaptability of the series' social media context(s) in order to establish a paradigm better applicable to the expanding canon of what I label *distributed adaptations*.

Introducing KateModern: Characterising Social Media Fictions

Conceptually speaking, social media adaptations sit at the intersection of adaptation studies and the emerging strain of digital narratology interested in fictional narratives found in social media spaces. As Eugenia Kuznetsova details, the growing prevalence of works of 'social media fiction,' whether adapted or original, points to the consolidation of a new 'genre of literature transmitted through various Social Network Services (SNS) ... characterized by the use of the variety of tools in SNS such as tagging, immediate interaction with audience, communication between readers and fictional

¹⁰ Kuznetsova, 'Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform', 271.

¹¹ Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2015).

characters, and general blurring [of] the line between fiction and reality.’¹² In order to unpack the three main claims comprising Kuznetsova’s definition, we might consider an early and highly successful example of this form: the web series *KateModern*,¹³ produced by the creators of LonelyGirl15 in partnership with the once-popular SNS Bebo.

Following the life of London-based art student Kate and her friends Charlie, Gavin and Tariq, *KateModern* continues the unsettling mythology at the core of LonelyGirl15, with Kate similarly possessing the rare ‘trait positive’ blood abnormality which makes her (like Bree) prey to the mysterious organisation known as The Order. As Elizabeth Evans recounts,

The central mysteries of what Kate’s blood type means, who the members of The Order were and whether they would succeed in kidnapping her in order to steal her blood underpin each of the individual videos. When Kate is murdered at the beginning of the second season, the narrative shifts to the hunt for her killer and the protection of other girls with “trait positive” blood.¹⁴

The series ran from July 2007 to June 2008 and was marketed as an online ‘teen drama,’ spanning two seasons and over three hundred episodes in all. Like LonelyGirl15, its episodes each assumed the form of vlogs, involving characters who directly addressed webcams and digital cameras, both in traditional domestic settings and out-and-about in locations around London. Reportedly garnering more than 50 million total views,¹⁵ *KateModern* was hailed an immense success, boasting alongside impressive viewing statistics a number of high-profile sponsorship deals,¹⁶ and an extensive and enthusiastic online fan community.¹⁷ Though *KateModern* was not a social media

¹² Kuznetsova, ‘Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform’, 271.

¹³ Archives of the *KateModern* videos can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/KateModernLG15/videos>

¹⁴ Elizabeth Evans, “‘Carnaby Street, 10 A.m.’: *KateModern* and the Ephemeral Dynamics of Online Drama’, in *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, ed. Paul Grainge (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 161.

¹⁵ See Liz Gannes, ‘KateModern to Conclude, But Why?’, *Gigaom*, 12 May 2008, <https://gigaom.com/2008/05/12/katemodern-to-conclude-but-why/>; Jemima Kiss, ‘Bebo’s KateModern to End Next Month’, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/may/12/bebo.web20>.

¹⁶ Emma Hall, ‘TAKE LONELYGIRL, SHIP HER TO THE U.K., ADD BRANDS; Result: “KateModern,” Online Show That Invites Marketers to Get into the Drama’, *Advertising Age* 78, no. 35 (9 March 2007): 8.

¹⁷ Though the official forum for *KateModern* (<http://www.lg15.com/katemodern/forum/>) is now closed, a screenshot of their homepage archived in September 2008 (two months after the second series’ completion) boasts 9987 forum posts and 16193 total members. These statistics give some indication of

adaptation, but rather an original story commissioned by the platform, its narrative was similarly conceived and configured to best utilize the affordances of a given social media interface, thereby aligning it both with the genre of social media fiction and the style of adaptations aforementioned.

For Kuznetsova, one of the main characteristics of social media fictions is their inseparability from the platforms they are authored for. As Alice Bell has similarly observed of digital media, social media platforms ‘offer writers and programmers a whole array of tools with which they can build narratives, many of which are unavailable to authors who write in print.’¹⁸ Varying dramatically from platform to platform, these tools necessarily influence the form and appearance of the fictional content posted to them. *KateModern* foregrounds this sense of medium-specificity in its ambitious utilization of the interactive features (once) offered by Bebo’s interface. As Miles Beckett, one of *KateModern*’s creators, recounts, the series was specifically formulated around the ‘question of how [to best] use the platform.’¹⁹ Throughout the series, the creators encouraged fans to engage with the unfolding drama not solely through the vlog episodes uploaded to the site, but also through an array of quizzes, photos, whiteboard drawings, widgets and blog posts connected to the central narrative. These features each offered new tools with which the writers could diversify their contributions to the narrative: photo albums were used to host pictures of unknown locations or cryptic messages for fans to decipher; whiteboard sketches were drawn to communicate pictorial messages between characters; polls were created to gather audience feedback on characters’ actions and decisions; and blogs were authored to supply extra details about events not shown on-camera. Distributing *KateModern* across these features in turn motivated the audience to engage not just with the content of the series’ videos but also with Bebo itself. Extending beyond the video-centric model of its predecessor LonelyGirl15, the creators of *KateModern* designed a series where the narrative was inseparable from the social media platform for which it was conceived.

the wealth of fans eager to engage with *KateModern* and its community beyond Bebo. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20080905091121/http://www.lg15.com/katemodern/forum/>

¹⁸ Alice Bell, ‘Media-Specific Metalepsis in *10:01*’, in *Analyzing Digital Fiction*, ed. Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin, and Hans Kristian Rustad (New York: Routledge, 2014), 21.

¹⁹ Miles Beckett, quoted in Creeber, ‘It’s Not TV, It’s Online Drama’, 600.

In addition to medium-specificity, Kuznetsova's definition of social media fictions also highlights the interactivity of works in this genre, a characteristic explicitly linked with the communicative ethos of their social media contexts. For everyday social media users, content posted to SNS typically serves not only as a means of personal expression, but is more specifically a mode of communication directed towards and intended to engage with the networks among whom the content is circulated. Accordingly, many works of social media fiction adopt first-person perspectives, involving content purportedly authored by the characters for publication on their own social media profiles. This authorial stance, and the direct address with which it is often paired, enhances the approachability of a fiction by aligning its content with a personalized—if fictional—figure, with whom the audience is invited to interact. *KateModern*, for instance, assigned eleven characters their own Bebo accounts. These profiles were variously used to supply additional information about the characters' personalities, life histories and relationships; to host narrative content uploaded by the characters; and, most importantly, to facilitate character interactions with the audience. Throughout the series, fans could write to and receive personalized comments from their favourite characters,²⁰ thereby framing the characters' use of Bebo as everyday users, enabling them to express their interests, document the developments in their lives, and engage with their own social networks.

For Kuznetsova, the interactive quality of social media fictions is likely to affect their unfolding in two main regards. On the one hand, depending on the flexibility of the story, the audience's reactions, thoughts and responses may influence the direction of the narrative, informing its development in much the same way a work of interactive fiction is influenced by the input of a user.²¹ Indeed, the characters of *KateModern* frequently called upon their viewers for help in solving the cryptic puzzles central to the advancement of the series' mysterious plot. In one instance, Evans recounts, Kate wakes the day after attending a doctor's appointment to discover she has no recollection of it:

She finds a series of photos on her phone which her friend Steve posts online in an attempt to find out where she had been. [Another character] Sophie then encouraged viewers to write in with their suggestions for the photos' locations.

²⁰ Evans, "Carnaby Street, 10 A.m.", 164.

²¹ For an overview of this style of storytelling, see Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005).

Those viewers who did were rewarded with an in-text message of thanks from Kate.²²

Evans observes that engaging with these puzzles meant that audiences could increase their sense of involvement in the story, with their public discussions of and contributions to the narrative positioning them as ‘part of a more visible *KateModern* community.’²³ Though the solutions to these riddles were likely factored into the scripts of future episodes well before they were reached by fans,²⁴ the series’ narrative advancement nonetheless relied on fans’ public communication of their answers to the characters so as to justify the story’s progression, implicating audience interaction as a crucial component of the drama.

The other possible effect of social media fictions’ interactivity is that the ‘feedback from the audience in the form of likes, shares, reposts, tags, and comments ... [may] become part of [the] literary text. Likes, shares and their analogues in Instagram and Twitter directly influence how the text is perceived by others[,] making it more or less significant in digital discourse.’²⁵ By design, in other words, the interactive functions of SNS grant audiences the ability to influence the framing of fictional content, publicizing personal judgements or reactions which may affect other viewers’ interpretations of the story. Though this effect was not so pertinent for early social media fictions such as *KateModern*, it has since been augmented by the introduction of social media fictions across platforms such as Instagram and Twitter, which each prominently display audience responses and feedback alongside the blocks of ‘micro-content’ they host.²⁶

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly for this thesis, Kuznetsova’s definition also emphasises the tendency for social media fictions to replicate the aesthetics and behaviours commonplace on the platforms for which they are produced. This quality is reminiscent of a dynamic Angela Thomas identifies at play in ‘blog fiction,’ a genre of ‘fiction which is produced where an author or authors have used a blog as a *writing*

²² Evans, “‘Carnaby Street, 10 A.m.’”, 165.

²³ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵ Kuznetsova, ‘Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform’, 272.

²⁶ Bryan Alexander and Alan Levine, ‘Web 2.0 Storytelling: Emergence of a New Genre’, *EDUCAUSE Review* 43, no. 6 (2008): 42.

device, using all of the features afforded by the blogging or journalising software, such as hyperlinks, graphics, and the commenting system.²⁷ Likewise, in the case of contemporary social media fiction, authors may employ elements such as hashtags, hyperlinks, photo attachments, tags or reaction GIFs to give shape to their fiction, in the process aligning their content more closely with the form and styles that regularly circulate on their SNS of choice.

Often, as Kuznetsova points out, this stylistic mimicry has the effect of blurring ‘the line between real social life and fictional stories,’ with authors producing works of fiction convincingly camouflaged amidst the non-fictional content posted by everyday users.²⁸ In many instances, an author’s desire to evoke this effect can be seen to directly inform the creative direction pursued by their fiction. In the case of *LonelyGirl15*, for instance, the series’ creators closely modelled the aesthetics of Bree’s early videos on the vlogging behaviours and styles most popular in the YouTube community, attempting to conceal the fictionality of the series’ premise long enough to ensure an audience for, as well as the eventual profitability of, a *LonelyGirl15* movie spin-off.²⁹ Though not all examples of social media fiction go to such lengths—nor, as will soon be discussed, necessarily intend to deceive their audience into believing that a story and its characters are ‘real’—I would argue that the capacity to camouflage social media fictions as ‘real’ is latent in all examples of this genre, figured into the very act of their production. Because social media platforms are intended for use by real people, for the purpose of facilitating real—albeit mediated—communication, writers who wish to use them as sites for fictional storytelling must also adhere to the behaviours required of everyday users, channelling their fluency in non-fictional social media practices into the creation of a fictional text. The potential for camouflaging works of social media fiction thus emerges from a requisite match between the affordances of the platform and the proficiency of the fiction’s author in using them; should this eventuate, the fictional content gains authenticity from being invested with the writer’s platform competency,

²⁷ Angela Thomas, ‘Fictional Blogs’, in *Uses of Blogs*, ed. Axel Bruns and Joanne Jacobs (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 201.

²⁸ Kuznetsova, ‘Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform’, 271.

²⁹ Senft, *Camgirls*, 29.

in turn disguising its fabrication among the examples of non-fictional content supplied by real-world users.

As aforementioned, however, social media fictions vary in their approaches to, as well as the intended effect of, such camouflage. *KateModern*, for instance, was from the beginning 'outed' as a work of fiction, with links to each of the characters' profiles regularly featured on Bebo's landing page, and its casting of established actors (such as Ralf Little as Gavin) immediately betraying the series' fabrication. Despite this, however, *KateModern* succeeded in maintaining a sense of ambiguity around its fictionality. As an article penned during *KateModern*'s second season details, '[t]he series producer, Pete Gibbons ... spends part of his day posting replies to confused viewers on the KateModern profile page on Bebo, explaining that Kate is played by an actress, and is not a real person that has just been murdered.'³⁰ This confusion about the realism of the series likely stemmed from the creators' success in adhering to and replicating the behaviours normalized within the Bebo community. However, while these efforts succeeded in blurring the distinction between reality and fiction, their purpose was not to mislead *KateModern*'s audience, but was instead derived from the motivations behind the series' production. In commissioning the producers of *LonelyGirl15* to create *KateModern*, Bebo contracted the design of a web series intended to attract new users to the platform and, moreover, to educate new and existing users alike about the full range of affordances offered by the SNS. *KateModern*'s creators were thus tasked with producing a work of fiction which, in the process of engaging the audience in its narrative developments, would also motivate increased and more diverse use of the features available across the platform. It was in an effort to deliver on these demands that the creators of *KateModern* drew such attention to their competency in using the platform, in the process ascribing a credibility to their characters which, for many confused fans, served to call into question the fictionality of the series.

Lost in Adaptations: The Lizzie Bennett Diaries and Transmedia Storytelling

Just as real-world social media competencies are required for authoring original works of social media fictions, so too are they necessary for reconfiguring pre-existing

³⁰ Sophie Morris, 'Kate Modern: Making a Drama with a Minimum of Fuss', *The Independent*, 25 February 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/kate-modern-making-a-drama-with-a-minimum-of-fuss-786688.html>.

narratives to fit the affordances of social media. In fact, depending on the extent of the audiences' knowledge about the source material,³¹ observing the adaptor's proficiency in utilizing these skills may even constitute part of a social media adaptation's initial appeal. Silke Jandl proposes that this was likely the case for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the originator of the literary adaptation web series genre; she speculates that 'the first viewers of the show were arguably drawn to the videos out of curiosity, interested in how the source text might be adapted to suit the context of YouTube.'³² Jandl here hints at an intriguing tension at the core of the series, inseparable from *LBD*'s status as an adaptation and true, too, of the many literary adaptation web series which it has since inspired. Recalling Linda Hutcheon's suggestion that part of the pleasure of adapted texts derives 'from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise,'³³ literary adaptation web series ground their innovative storytelling methods and structures in the reputations of 'tried and trusted' works of literature.³⁴ Not only does this afford these series established narrative templates with which they may experiment, but it also alleviates the risk of such experimental ventures by promising to attract audiences already attached to the story. It is thus unsurprising that the most prolific and commercially social media adaptation to date is based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, for there are few other literary fandoms so enthusiastic as the Janeites.³⁵

In the first edition of the journal *Adaptation*, Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan and Imelda Whelehan remark upon the immense popularity of Austen's novels as sources for filmic and televisual adaptations, observing that the extensive canon of examples of—and corresponding literature on—'Austen on Screen' has cemented it as a discipline 'in [its] own right.'³⁶ In an effort to explain Hollywood's continued interest in Austen adaptations, Linda Troost and Sayre N. Greenfield observe that '[t]he qualities

³¹ A more detailed account of the effect of 'knowing' and 'unknowing' audiences for adaptations can be found in Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 113–39.

³² Jandl, 'Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', 169.

³³ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 4.

³⁴ John Ellis, quoted in *ibid.*, 5.

³⁵ For an overview of the substantial history of Jane Austen enthusiasts, see Deidre Lynch, *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan, and Imelda Whelehan, 'Introduction to Adaptation', *Adaptation* 1, no. 1 (2008): 3.

that make [her] novels appealing material for the large and small screen include values that, if not immutable, have been continually appreciated over the last two hundred years.³⁷ These values, they suggest, include the relatability of Austen's characters; the continued relevance of '[t]he concerns at the center of her plots,' namely 'sex, romance and money'; the allure of escapism into 'a simpler time as it was lived by a comfortably wealthy and leisurely class'; and a reinstating of manners otherwise absent from contemporary life.³⁸ Though Austen adaptations have been a feature of Hollywood since as early as 1938, the 1990s in particular saw a wealth of such productions, with many more having since emerged: as Marie N. Sørnbø recounts, '[s]ince BBC aired its two 1995 productions of *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice*, twenty-four more films have appeared with her name or her novels in the title,' attesting to Jane Austen's reputation as 'one of the most frequently adapted of all the English authors.'³⁹ More recently, Austen's legacy has extended beyond film and television, finding a new home on YouTube, with the breakout success of the literary adaptation web series *LBD* exemplifying the continued appeal of Austen's storytelling in the twenty-first century, as well as the translatability of her works across new mediums.⁴⁰

In this modernized rendition of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Bennet is a twenty-four year-old graduate student studying mass communication, living at home with her parents and two sisters: Jane, the eldest, an aspiring fashion designer, and Lydia, the youngest, a perpetually enthusiastic and mischievous 'party girl.' When she is not studying, Lizzie spends much of her time attempting to placate her overbearing mother, whose emphatic belief that 'a man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife'—a slogan which features proudly on the t-shirts she had custom-made as Christmas gifts for Lizzie, Jane and Lydia⁴¹—serves as motivation for her endlessly meddling behaviour. Thus when a wealthy medical student named Bing Lee moves into one of the most expensive houses in their neighbourhood, Mrs Bennet

³⁷ Linda Troost and Sayre N. Greenfield, *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3–4.

³⁹ Marie N. Sørnbø, *Irony and Idyll: Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park On-Screen* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2014), 2.

⁴⁰ Playlists of all the videos from *LBD* may be accessed at 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries - YouTube'.

⁴¹ The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, *My Name Is Lizzie Bennet - Ep: 1*, accessed 8 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KisuGP2lcPs>.

wastes no time in attempting to pair the eligible bachelor with one of her three daughters. Her first opportunity arises at a wedding of a friend of the Bennet family, which Bing, his beautiful sister Caroline and his best friend William Darcy, another handsome and incredibly wealthy bachelor, are also set to attend. Throughout the course of the evening, to Mrs Bennet's delight, Bing and Jane become increasingly enamoured with each other, and Lizzie is the only woman in attendance to dance with Darcy. However, as Lizzie later confesses to her viewers, she found this experience less than pleasant: 'As many of you know, I recently had the absolute pleasure of meeting Bing Lee's friend and house guest, William Darcy. [Perhaps] *Absolute* isn't the right word... It was more of a grotesque, nauseating, run-the-other-way-as-if-your-life-depended-on-it pleasure.'⁴² Lizzie recounts that after an awkward dance and a series of rebuffed attempts at conversation, her poor opinion of Darcy was secured when she overheard him describing Jane as 'the only tolerable girl in the room,' and her, conversely, as 'decent enough.'⁴³ This disagreeable first meeting instigates and cements an antagonistic relationship between the two, delaying the romance which—as fans of the novel are well aware—eventually transpires between them.

In *LBD*, however, none of this plot is 'played out' before the audience: instead, viewers learn about it through Lizzie's vlogs, where she talks about her life to, has conversations in front of, and dramatically re-enacts off-screen happenings for a camera set up in her bedroom, often accompanied by her sisters or by her best friend Charlotte Lu.⁴⁴ It is telling, for instance, that though Mrs Bennet's overwhelming desire to see her daughters married to affluent men serves as the main impetus for the events which open the series, we do not ever actually meet her; instead, we see Lizzie dressing up and performing as (what we are led to believe is) an exaggerated version of her mother, re-enacting her determined match-making attempts (see Figure 2). Likewise, we do not see Darcy in-person until the fifty-ninth episode in the series—until this point, he too is either simply talked about or is a subject of Lizzie's 'costume theatre' re-enactments. As these examples underscore, the vlog format adopted by *LBD* helps to align the series'

⁴² The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, *Snobby Mr. Douchey - Ep: 6*, accessed 8 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lmo22HWhbM>.

⁴³ The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, *The Most Awkward Dance Ever - Ep: 7*, accessed 8 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SPDX0rOuds>.

⁴⁴ Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries', 101.

narrative specifically with Lizzie's character and point-of-view. Augmenting the free indirect discourse which often biased the omniscient narration of Austen's novel, the web series uses vlogs to sustain a first-person narrative perspective, offering its viewers a story explicitly influenced by Lizzie's voice, recollections and prejudices.⁴⁵

Lizzie, however, is not the only character from *LBD* to vlog about her life. Reminiscent of earlier web texts such as *LonelyGirl15* and *KateModern*, *LBD*'s narrative was told using multiple YouTube channels, incorporating the voices of many characters into the presentation of its story. As Jessica Seymour, Jenny Roth and Monica Flegel note, throughout the series the creators 'ran parallel vlogs for other characters, which added a post-structural twist to the narrative. While Lizzie's vlogs told the main story, secondary characters Georgiana Darcy, Charlotte Lu's (Austen's Charlotte Lucas') sister Maria, and Lydia Bennet added their perspectives, layering the storytelling in ways not present in the original novel.'⁴⁶ Though viewers were able to follow the story's narrative solely by watching the vlogs uploaded to Lizzie's channel, subscribing to the videos posted to all of the YouTube accounts offered more intimate encounters with the



Figure 2. Lizzie and her best friend Charlotte as Mrs and Mr Bennet. From "My Parents: Opposingly Supportive – Ep: 3". Accessed 11/9/16. URL: https://youtu.be/e926p_3UXes

⁴⁵ For further discussion on the narrative affinities between the vlog format and Austen's novel, see Jandl, 'Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', 170–71.

⁴⁶ Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries', 101.

supporting characters, who often received little screen-time on Lizzie's channel, as well as providing information about secondary storylines not known to Lizzie.⁴⁷ The nefarious George Wickham's seduction of Lydia, for instance, is documented exclusively in the vlogs uploaded to Lydia's YouTube channel, TheLydiaBennet. In these clips, viewers witness the relationship between Lydia and George growing increasingly toxic, with Lydia becoming progressively isolated from her friends and family, and Wickham's emotionally abusive tactics becoming increasingly apparent.⁴⁸ Because Lydia and Lizzie are not speaking nor watching each other's videos at this point in the series, Lydia's increasingly worn-down appearance and diminishing self-worth goes unseen by Lizzie, and, in turn, unmentioned in any of the videos on Lizzie's channel—until, that is, Lizzie is alerted to the existence of a sex tape featuring Lydia which Wickham is threatening to publically release.⁴⁹ As this example makes clear, the use of multiple YouTube channels also allowed *LBD*'s writers to segregate their storylines, facilitating their ability to withhold narrative information from other characters for dramatic effect. This, in turn, motivated increased engagement from the series' audience, as it was only by following all of the YouTube channels curated by the series—combining the different character perspectives and storylines each had to offer—that fans could gain the most comprehensive understanding of the series' unfolding narrative.

In addition to this multi-channel format, the creators of *LBD* also recognised and engaged with the potential for web-based stories to traverse *multiple* SNS, rather than being confined to just one. As Seymour, Roth and Flegel recount, *LBD*'s story 'was presented across a number of platforms [including] YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, and occasionally on Pinterest and This is My Jam, depending on the characters' profiles and interests.'⁵⁰ During its initial run, viewers could observe the characters interacting with each other on social media platforms such as Twitter,⁵¹ responding to

⁴⁷ Jessica Seymour conceptualises this layering of perspectives as an example of Foucault's 'heterotopia.' See Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', 106.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, TheLydiaBennet, *Special Two - Ep: 28*, accessed 14 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHeYlGGasjo>.

⁴⁹ The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, *Ugh - Ep: 84*, accessed 14 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k90qMr3Sstg>.

⁵⁰ Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries', 101.

⁵¹ For a compilation of the *LBD* Twitter interactions see 'Twitter', *Pemberley Digital*, accessed 11 April 2016, <http://www.pemberleydigital.com/the-lizzie-bennet-diaries/story-lbd/twitter/>.

fan-art and user-made graphics on Tumblr,⁵² and cultivating their own online presence, as in the case of Jane Bennett, who gained a substantial following (likely including individuals not fans of the series) by showcasing various fashion looks on LOOKBOOK.⁵³ Not only did this online behaviour add ‘character depth and more nuances to the plotline,’⁵⁴ but it also encouraged increased engagement by enabling fans to directly interact with ‘the characters in all of these spaces.’⁵⁵ Of course, having social media profiles for characters was not a feature unique to *LBD*: earlier web series such as *KateModern* had already experimented with this technique, having their writers communicate directly with fans using character pseudonyms. However, it was the *variety* of social media platforms utilized to tell the *LBD* narrative, as well as the complexity of the interactions undertaken using them, that characterised the series’ social media approach as highly innovative: Lizzie’s story was told not only on YouTube, nor simply across a range of YouTube channels, but was in fact orchestrated to unfold across an entire matrix of social media platforms.

In many popular and academic accounts, this narrative layout has been celebrated as an example of ‘transmedia storytelling,’⁵⁶ evoking the theoretical phrase first popularised by media scholar Henry Jenkins. Indeed, the series’ innovative social media usage and cross-platform design has been largely attributed to *LBD*’s so-called ‘Transmedia Producer’ Jay Bushman, and in the wake of *LBD*’s success, the term has become a common descriptor for web series with narratives that similarly draw upon (and move across) multiple social media platforms. Demonstrating the ability of social media to host and facilitate fictional narratives which are ‘open-ended, branching, hyperlinked, cross-media, participatory, exploratory, and unpredictable,’⁵⁷ these web series raise questions about the types of narrative structures newly enabled by digital

⁵² ‘The Lizzie Bennet Diaries’, accessed 11 April 2016, <http://lizziebennetdiaries.tumblr.com/>.

⁵³ ‘Looks By Jane’, *LOOKBOOK*, accessed 11 April 2016, <http://lookbook.nu/looksbyjane>.

⁵⁴ Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, ‘The Lizzie Bennet Diaries’, 101.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ See, for example, Fruzsina Eördögh, ‘Transmedia Shows Are Winning the Internet’, *Motherboard*, 10 April 2014, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/transmedia-shows-are-winning-the-internet>; Karen Swallow Prior, ‘The New, Old Way to Tell Stories: With Input From the Audience’, *The Atlantic*, 18 October 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/10/the-new-old-way-to-tell-stories-with-input-from-the-audience/280682/>; Whyte, ‘Jay Bushman on Transmedia in “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries”’.

⁵⁷ Alexander and Levine, ‘Web 2.0 Storytelling: Emergence of a New Genre’.

media, not the least of which is whether, for all its popularity, the term 'transmedia' is indeed the most appropriate descriptor for the structural complexities of stories which traverse multiple social media platforms.

While Jenkins' interest in transmedia storytelling can be traced back to as early as 2001,⁵⁸ it is the expanded definition he offers in his seminal title *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) that is most often cited in academic discussions of the concept. In an analysis of *The Matrix* franchise's narrative complexity, Jenkins observes that its creators commissioned and integrated 'multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium,' spreading from film to comics, video games and animated shorts.⁵⁹ Each text, Jenkins notes, draws from the same pool of characters, histories, logics and locations, while also serving as a 'self-contained' contribution to the *Matrix* canon.⁶⁰ This ambitious spread of stories epitomises what he terms 'transmedia storytelling': a style of storytelling which 'unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.'⁶¹ In Jenkins' conceptualisation, transmedia storytelling involves a large number of texts which each have the capacity to serve as 'a point of entry into the franchise.'⁶² The variety of mediums these texts traverse presents audiences with a variety of ways to enter and enjoy the fictional universe, in the process diversifying audience demographics, heightening narrative intrigue and affording a more rewarding consumption experience for fans.⁶³

Though designing and deploying such complex universes is undoubtedly a time-consuming and challenging enterprise, creators and producers are likely to see substantial economic benefits should a popular transmedia franchise transpire from their efforts. As M. J. Clarke summarises, 'the more a viewer invests time and money in these texts, the more consumption capital is accrued and the more valuable are

⁵⁸ Henry Jenkins, 'Convergence? I Diverge.', *Technology Review*, June 2001; Henry Jenkins, 'Transmedia Storytelling', *MIT Technology Review*, 15 January 2003, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/401760/transmedia-storytelling/>.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

subsequent encounters with the text in all its forms.’⁶⁴ Indeed, the economic viability of transmedia storytelling has over the last two decades been attested to by the immense success of transmedia franchises such as *24* (2001—), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2016), *Big Brother* (1999—), *Lost* (2004-2010), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999-2016) and *Harry Potter* (1997—).⁶⁵ These franchises each exhibit the encyclopaedic quality fundamental to Jenkins’ conceptualisation, featuring ‘a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers.’⁶⁶ Their texts are commissioned to each contribute new knowledge about the franchise’s complex universe, adhering to the logic of what Matt Hills terms the ‘hyperdiegesis’⁶⁷ by embracing ‘the fact that the viewer only sees part of that world and will be encouraged to subsequently seek out information on those hidden parts via the extensions onto multiple platforms.’⁶⁸

This distribution of narrative information often requires fans to unite, working together to aggregate, record and decipher each meaningful contribution to the transmedia storyworld they encounter. For Jenkins, such behaviour epitomises philosopher Pierre Lévy’s concept of ‘collective intelligence,’ whereby viewers can ‘get even more out of the experience if they compare notes and share resources than if they try to go it alone.’⁶⁹ Accordingly, fans of transmedia storytelling ventures often assume an active, detective-like role, searching for, consuming and connecting various plots, storylines and clues on the chance the information will prove useful to the community the text has inspired. Jason Mittell recently coined the phrase ‘forensic fandom’ to characterise the mode of engagement which emerges when viewers are invited ‘to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its

⁶⁴ M. J. Clarke, *Transmedia Television: New Trends in Network Serial Production* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 5.

⁶⁵ Carlos Alberto Scolari, ‘Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production’, *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 590; Jenkins, ‘Transmedia Storytelling’.

⁶⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97.

⁶⁷ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 137.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 11.

⁶⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

telling.⁷⁰ Due to their elaborate distribution of narrative information and their cross-medium audience appeal, Suzanne Scott proposes that transmedia texts are ultimately 'defined by their ability to expand: they expand and enrich a fictional universe, they expand across media platforms, and they empower an expansive fan base by promoting collective intelligence as a consumption strategy.'⁷¹

In the years since *Convergence Culture's* publication, Jenkins' conceptualisation of transmedia storytelling has gained substantial popularity, both within academe and the media industry itself.⁷² Among these same circles, however, the term 'transmedia' has assumed a life of its own, serving as a catch-all phrase variously employed to describe multi-media marketing strategies, spin-offs, and the structure of Hollywood franchises more generally.⁷³ Often, this usage strays significantly from the emphasis on world-expansion and knowledge-mining central to Jenkins' definition, signifying, in turn, the need for a new vocabulary which more accurately captures the complex narrative structures both introduced and facilitated by the expansion of digital technologies over the last two decades.⁷⁴

To this point, 'transmedia' may not be the most appropriate descriptor for the 'distributed narratives'⁷⁵ of web series such as *LBD*, despite the widespread and even creator-endorsed application of this term. At odds with the sprawling, multi-layered universes of interest to Jenkins, the fictional worlds of literary adaptation web series cannot be perpetually expanded across multiple mediums, precisely because their narratives derive from already completed texts. Rather, the status of these web series as (modernized) adaptations introduces a range of restrictions which hamper the creators'

⁷⁰ Jason Mittell, 'Forensic Fandom and the Drillable Text', *Spreadable Media*, 17 December 2012, <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/mittell/>.

⁷¹ Suzanne Scott, 'Who's Steering the Mothership?: The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling', in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43.

⁷² Carlos A. Scolari and Indrek Ibrus, 'Transmedia Critical: Empirical Investigations into Multiplatform and Collaborative Storytelling', *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 2192.

⁷³ Henry Jenkins, 'Seven Myths About Transmedia Storytelling Debunked', *Fast Company*, 8 April 2011, <http://www.fastcompany.com/1745746/seven-myths-about-transmedia-storytelling-debunked>; Evans, *Transmedia Television*, 2.

⁷⁴ Mittell, *Complex TV*, 293.

⁷⁵ See Jill Walker, 'Distributed Narrative: Telling Stories Across Networks' (AoIR 5.0, Brighton, 2004), 1-12.

ability to expand or alter the fictional storyworld in any substantial way, assigning them instead the difficult task of balancing their own creative impulses with a responsibility to uphold the (often longstanding) reputation of the source text. In response to this conundrum, *LBD* advanced an innovative storytelling structure whereby multiple mediums—in this case, social media platforms—were employed not for the purpose of expanding the *universe* the text operates within, but to enrich the audience’s experience of *a single story* occurring within a fictional world. By introducing a structure of integrated narrative elements distributed across multiple platforms, *LBD* inaugurated a new genre of storytelling that we might label *distributed adaptations*: texts which pique the interest of an audience not through their ability to use multiple mediums to create something new, but rather through the way they orchestrate the adaptation of a well-known story to play out across a number of channels.

An Alternative Model: Multi-Channel Storytelling

In a 2004 conference paper entitled “Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling,” Christy Dena draws attention to the lack of terminology for (and, indeed, literature on) storytelling efforts which involve multiple texts and mediums, but which include narrative elements that do not adhere to the autonomy prescribed by Jenkins’ definition of transmedia. As aforementioned, Jenkins requires each ‘franchise entry ... to be self-contained so you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product [must be able to serve as] a point of entry into the franchise as a whole.’⁷⁶ However, if cross-media elements are included to *assist* the delivery of a primary narrative, rather than boasting narrative coherence in their own right, then perhaps, Dena speculates, these texts fall under—and in fact require—a theoretical model other than Jenkins’ ‘transmedia.’

This same argument is central to Jason Mittell’s more recent critiques of Jenkins’ theorisation of transmedia storytelling. In *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2012), Mittell similarly draws attention to the way Jenkins’ theory *equally favours* the narrative centrality and autonomous coherence of each text involved in a transmedia storytelling venture.⁷⁷ This, Mittell argues, is far from the case in the contemporary mediascape, where ‘[n]early every media property ... offers some

⁷⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 96.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*

transmedia extensions, such as promotional websites, merchandise, or behind-the-scenes materials.⁷⁸ Drawing on the work of Jonathan Gray, Mittell categorises these types of transmedia extensions as ‘paratexts’: texts which exist in relation to—and often in service of—a ‘core text,’ whether that be ‘a feature film, a video-game, or a television series.’⁷⁹ Paratexts do not have the same narrative weight, nor textual significance, as the core text they gravitate around; instead, they are used to frame, promote or extend the audience’s reception and interpretation. This dynamic is neatly illustrated by the marketing campaign for the 2008 film *Cloverfield*, for example, which included an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) that mystified and intrigued fans for months prior to the film’s release.⁸⁰ Involving a range of elements, including vague teaser trailers, character profiles on Myspace, fan vidding competitions, cryptic online restaurant reviews, and an array of original websites, the *Cloverfield* ARG promoted the film by piquing the curiosity of potential audiences, encouraging them to locate, aggregate and solve clues which had been distributed across multiple sources.⁸¹ As a result, players of the ARG were familiarised with the film’s tone, characters and storyworld long before they were able to watch it in theatres. Given the prevalence of similar (though perhaps not as extensive) paratextual arrangements in the contemporary mediascape, Mittell posits that it is thus

... useful to distinguish between Jenkins’s proposed ideal of *balanced transmedia*, with no one medium or text serving a primary role over others, with the more commonplace model of *unbalanced transmedia*, with a clearly identifiable core text and a number of peripheral transmedia extensions that might be more or less integrated into the narrative whole, acknowledging that most examples fall somewhere on a spectrum between balanced and unbalanced.⁸²

This notion of ‘unbalanced transmedia’ is at the heart of the narrative schema Dena, almost a decade earlier, proposed in answer to the bias of Jenkins’ transmedia model. Her multi-channel storytelling structure involves three tiers, respectively termed

⁷⁸ Mittell, *Complex TV*, 293.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; see also Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

⁸⁰ For more information about Alternate Reality Games as a genre, see Christy Dena, ‘Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games’, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008): 41–57.

⁸¹ For an extensive archive of the *Cloverfield* ARG and the fan community it inspired, see ‘Cloverfield Clues’, accessed 22 August 2016, <http://cloverfieldclues.blogspot.com/>.

⁸² Mittell, *Complex TV*, 294.

story, storyworld and commodity channels.⁸³ Story channels, Dena writes, are ‘designed as [the] primary source of information about characters, setting and plot’ and are ‘experienced as an entry-point to the whole multi-channel work.’⁸⁴ They are the authoritative storytelling source, establishing and sustaining ‘consistent information about characters, setting [and] plot.’⁸⁵ Story channels are inseparable from the narrative they are employed to tell, providing the ‘narrative core’⁸⁶ of the storytelling venture and serving as the ‘mothership’⁸⁷ text around which other, peripheral elements are organized.

Storyworld channels, by contrast, are characterised by their efforts to provide ‘further information about characters, setting and plot that are primary or secondary in the story channel.’⁸⁸ They do ‘not play a direct role in the unfolding plot,’ but are instead tasked with ‘augment[ing] story comprehension’ by providing supplementary information about elements of the narrative otherwise downplayed (or neglected).⁸⁹ In both name and meaning, this channel-type is inseparable from the broader concept of ‘storyworld,’ which David Herman describes as ‘the world evoked implicitly as well as explicitly by a narrative,’ regardless of the medium by which that narrative is expressed.⁹⁰ Aligning with the cognitive approach Herman adopts, Ryan stresses that ‘a storyworld is more than a static container for the objects mentioned in a story; it is a dynamic model of evolving situations, and its representation in the recipient’s mind is a simulation of the changes that are caused by the events of the plot.’⁹¹ To the same effect,

⁸³ Dena, ‘Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling’.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Scolari, ‘Transmedia Storytelling’, 598.

⁸⁷ Scott, ‘Who’s Steering the Mothership?: The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling’, 46.

⁸⁸ Dena, ‘Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling’, emphasis added.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ David Herman, ‘Narrative Ways of Worldmaking’, in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, ed. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (New York & Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 71–87.

⁹¹ Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology’, in *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, ed. Jan-Noël Thon and Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 33.

Dena's storyworld channels are utilized by storytellers to enrich the audience's understanding of the fictional world in which a text is set.

Though crucial narrative information is not attached to them, storyworld channels may nonetheless feature micro-narratives of their own. As Mittell notes, however, the narrative potential of storyworld channels is always restricted by the fact that not every story channel viewer will opt to engage with them: the challenge for storytellers is that they 'must privilege the mothership by designing experiences that viewers can consume in a wide range of ways without sacrificing coherence or engagement, regardless of how aware they may be of paratextual extensions.'⁹² As a result, storyworld channels are forced to balance their required (narrative) submission to the story channel while still entertaining the demands of an audience seeking to further engage with the storyworld. Thus while storyworld channels do not have a significant narrative function, they do play an instrumental role in the *experience* of the story, enriching audiences' familiarity, knowledge and enjoyment of the world in which it takes place.

An alternative method of narrative engagement is through the 'commodity channels' which comprise the final tier of Dena's model: items which serve as extradiegetic 'attractor[s] to the storyworld and story channels,'⁹³ most typically in the form of merchandise fans are able to purchase, collect and/or wear. These elements are of low relevance to the narrative, having 'little to no impact [on] story comprehension,'⁹⁴ and are characterised by their inseparability from the affective relationships fans form *with* the narrative, serving as a tangible means of affirming, remembering and boasting of one's enjoyment of a story outside the parameters of the text itself. Despite their label, these channels may not in fact require a commercial transaction, serving instead as a 'materialis[ation of the] affective bonds'⁹⁵ between audience and text, as in the case of fanfiction or fan art with which eager audiences may freely interact.

⁹² Mittell, *Complex TV*, 295.

⁹³ Dena, 'Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling'.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Berryman and Kavka, 'The Role of Intimacy in the Celebification of Beauty Vloggers', 318.

Challenging dominant approaches to the analysis of distributed narratives, Dena's multi-channel storytelling model not only recognises the potential imbalance of information invested across narrative sources, but further interrogates the contributions of each source to the overarching narrative. To a greater extent than the 'transmedia' descriptor which is so often applied to distributed adaptations, Dena's multi-channel model offers a narratological framework which acknowledges and appreciates the limited, imbalanced and hierarchical narrative arrangement of the social media sources involved in such storytelling ventures, in turn affording a more detailed examination of the role each plays in the audience's experience of the fiction.

Bringing Back the Bard: Nothing Much to Do at Messina High

Among the ever-expanding canon of distributed adaptations inspired by *LBD* is the vlog series *Nothing Much to Do* (henceforth *NMTD*).⁹⁶ Much as *LBD* entered into an extensive canon of Austen adaptations, *NMTD* contributes a contemporary reimagining of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* to the exhaustive—if not 'countless'⁹⁷—catalogue of Shakespearean adaptations which have accumulated over the centuries. Its production also follows a number of highly-acclaimed iterations of the same play, including the 1993 film directed by Kenneth Branagh, and the 2013 version directed by Joss Whedon. While as Jennifer Clement observes, cinematic adaptations of Shakespearean texts have to date received a disproportionate level of attention within the field of adaptation studies,⁹⁸ a number of recent publications have focussed on Shakespeare's growing presence on social media, including Stephen O'Neill's *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard* (2015)⁹⁹ and a special edition of *Borrowers and Lenders* journal dedicated to the topic in 2016.¹⁰⁰ As a distributed

⁹⁶ A complete playlist of all of the episodes from *NMTD* can be accessed at 'Nothing Much To Do Story - YouTube'; alternatively, a fan-made guide to the series across platforms may be accessed at 'NMTD+', accessed 18 February 2017, <http://frommyivorytower.blogspot.com/>.

⁹⁷ Jennifer Clement, 'Beyond Shakespeare: Early Modern Adaptation Studies and Its Potential', *Literature Compass* 10, no. 9 (2013): 677.

⁹⁸ Jennifer Clement has written extensively about this bias, drawing attention to its implications for the study of adaptations based on the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries. See Clement, 'Beyond Shakespeare'; Jennifer Clement, 'Introduction to "Special Issue on Adaptation and Early Modern Culture: Shakespeare and Beyond"', *Shakespeare* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1-9.

⁹⁹ Stephen O'Neill, *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Maurizio Calbi and Stephen O'Neill, eds., 'Shakespeare and Social Media', *Borrowers and Lenders* 10, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016).

adaptation, *NMTD* both contributes to and updates this area of scholarship, attesting not only to the appeal of the bard in online form, but also the ease with which his characters and stories may be adapted across a range of social media platforms.

Relocating the events of Shakespeare's play from Italy to present-day Auckland, New Zealand, *NMTD* documents the lives and (romantic) escapades of a group of adolescents from Messina High School. Adhering to the style of distributed adaptation popularised by *LBD*, the creators of *NMTD* similarly spread their delivery of the series' narrative across multiple SNS, in this case YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram. The audience are welcomed into the series' diegesis through a YouTube vlog uploaded by Beatrice Duke, a seventh-form student who has recently moved from Wellington to live in Auckland with her cousins, Hero and Leo. As Beatrice explains, she has started a YouTube channel (eponymously titled *Nothing Much to Do*) in the hopes of documenting the many changes occurring in her life: 'I started thinking about this—this *vlog* thing. Y'know, it's *pretty much* a new year (still, kind of, ish, kind of, still) and I'm trying a lot of new things this year, and I thought, "Why not give it a go?"'¹⁰¹

Thanks to having spent many summer holidays in Auckland, Beatrice begins her first and final year at Messina High with an already close-knit group of friends: Ursula, an aspiring filmmaker and photographer; Pedro 'All 'Round Great Guy' Donaldson; the vivacious Meg; her hot-and-heavy boyfriend Robbie; and the shy but musically gifted Balthazar. At school, Bea also encounters her arch-nemesis, the quick-witted and sharp-tongued Benedick, his best friend Claudio, Pedro's younger half-brother John, his mysterious associate Cora, and two strange year nine students, Verges and Dogberry, who are often found lurking on the group's periphery. In close quarters, the already antagonistic relationship between Bea and Ben quickly escalates: Bea uploads a video of the two bickering after a school football match,¹⁰² and Ursula posts a video to her own channel (*Watch Projects*) documenting the pair's rapid-fire (if nonsensical) arguments during a school lunch period.¹⁰³ Soon after, Benedick begins his own YouTube channel

¹⁰¹ *Nothing Much To Do, And So It Begins... | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 7 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn57zw4--D0>.

¹⁰² *Nothing Much To Do, Football Antics: Part Two | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjd2HHnBvxw>.

¹⁰³ *Watch Projects, PROJECT II - ONE SHOT | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p5cOpKt30E>.

(benaddicktion), so as to continue his rivalry with Bea in an online domain. However, after watching Benedick's first video, an erratic rant about killing birds which he dedicates to the two of them,¹⁰⁴ Bea and Hero vow never to watch his vlogs again.¹⁰⁵

Bea's cousin Hero and Benedick's friend Claudio begin dating, publicizing their relationship in a 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag video that Hero uploads to Bea's YouTube channel.¹⁰⁶ Hero attempts to share the joy of her new romance with her cousin by encouraging Beatrice to get a boyfriend of her own, but an exasperated Bea soon uploads a vlog clarifying her position on the matter: 'Hero can have all of the *sickly sweet* desires that her beautiful heart wants, but oh my *god*, I *don't need a boyfriend*. No-one needs to join in this imaginary contract that involves peer pressure, and weird customs, and anniversaries, and just.... *No*.'¹⁰⁷ Her friends, however, have other ideas: in a video uploaded to the Watch Projects channel (deceptively entitled "MAKEUP BLOOPERS" to deter Bea and Ben from watching), the group adopt the moniker 'Team Love Gods,' secretly brainstorming ways to convince Bea and Ben that—for all their disagreements—they are actually 'perfect for each other.'¹⁰⁸ In an effort to appeal to the pair's sizable egos and stubborn natures, they resolve to have them 'eavesdrop on conversations of us talking about each of them liking the other.'¹⁰⁹ A few days later, the plan is put in action. Bea uploads a vlog documenting her reaction to 'accidentally' overhearing Ursula, Hero and Meg discussing the fact that Benedick is in love with her,¹¹⁰ a revelation which leaves her understandably incredulous: 'I'm sorry, Ben *likes* me? What's up with that?! He has a *really weird* way of showing that! What are you, *five*?

¹⁰⁴ benaddicktion, *BIRDS | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBKxEt3X-4E>.

¹⁰⁵ Nothing Much To Do, *Summer Tips | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vffh6QXxHI>.

¹⁰⁶ Nothing Much To Do, *Makeup Tutorial Feat. A Special Guest! | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 22 September 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_h2P898q9k.

¹⁰⁷ Nothing Much To Do, *Single Pringle | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAIwi3uMVVY>.

¹⁰⁸ Watch Projects, *PROJECT IV - MAKEUP BLOOPERS | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORgAnYAh2Tw>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Nothing Much To Do, *The Limits of Technology and the Art of Self-Representation in a Modern World | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_cPvl0YmsM.

Get over yourself! *God*. So immature...'¹¹¹ As the shock wears off, however, Beatrice admits that her relationship with Benedick wasn't always so tenuous, betraying the grain of truth in her friends' convictions:

Sure, when I was, like, fourteen, and I first met him... it was *cool*. Like, we got on well. Like, we both like banter, and talking, and discussing, and debating, and so it was cool to have someone to bounce ideas off, but, like, whatever, okay? He's a *dick*. I thought that *maybe* something would happen, but he was just all, like, "Uhh, I live in the *now* and I don't commit to anything and I'm just not interested and girls are dumb," and so *whatever!* You know? Fine! I hate him.¹¹²

Meanwhile, in the middle of filming a video for Ben's channel, Pedro is approached by his half-brother John, who encourages Pedro to warn Claudio of the rumours that Hero is cheating on him with Meg's boyfriend, Robbie. Pedro decides to upload the video of their exchange, publicizing his brother's suspicions for Claudio and the rest of YouTube to see.¹¹³ In attempt to prove the rumours false, John, Pedro and Claudio decide to head to Hero's house the next night, the same evening she, Beatrice, Meg and Ursula are planning a sleepover together. In the video later uploaded to Ben's channel, Claudio's spirits are visibly broken, suggesting he discovered proof of Hero's infidelity, though the three share no details about what they actually saw that night.¹¹⁴ The following weekend, Hero hosts her sixteenth birthday party, visually documenting her preparations in the photos uploaded to her Instagram account, @herotheduke, while Bea posts updates of her friends' arrival on her Twitter account, @beatricetheduke. Just after 6 o'clock, however, both of their accounts go silent. A week passes without any social media activity from the characters before a video entitled "HERO'S BIRTHDAY" is uploaded to Ursula's YouTube channel, accompanied by the description:

Here's the footage from last Saturday night. I didn't want to put it up because I thought it would come across as sensational. However, people have already uploaded edited footage from their phones onto facebook, [sic] and, personally, I

¹¹¹ Nothing Much To Do, *Help Me (Make Hero's Present Awesome) | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ekTu30_-4.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ benaddicktion, *Watch This, Claudio | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyiW1KJCHTE>.

¹¹⁴ benaddicktion, *HYPOTHETICALLY | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1J-haXjKV4>.

don't believe the situation has been fairly represented. Here is an unbiased point of view.¹¹⁵

Filmed by a bystander using Ursula's camera, the video shows Claudio aggressively confronting Hero about her supposed infidelity. Watched wide-eyed by all of her friends, he screams, 'You looked me in the eye and said you'd never [cheat on me], and then you go around behind my back and you *fuck* some other guy! *Robbie*, of all people! Look, you put on this fake little face but underneath it you're just a fucking slut!'¹¹⁶ In the video's final moments, we see a sobbing Hero escorted out of the room by Bea, and Pedro, furious on his friend's behalf, leaving after Claudio. When the events at Hero's party become hot gossip at school, Bea and Ben take to YouTube together, uploading a video on Bea's channel to put an end to the rumours circulating about her cousin.¹¹⁷

Hero's innocence is soon confirmed by some YouTube videos uploaded by the two outcast year nine students, self-professed detectives Verges and Dogberry, who call themselves 'The Watch.' The unlikely pair discover that the rumours of Hero's infidelity, as well as the commotion they caused, were part of a revenge plot orchestrated by John in an attempt to tarnish Pedro's perfect reputation.¹¹⁸ A couple of days later, Beatrice uploads a video revealing that Hero has been hospitalised. She announces an upcoming event in Hero's honour, where all of her friends will be able to film their well-wishes and messages of support. Ursula later uploads a video entitled "FOR HERO" showcasing the day's events. We see Claudio atoning for his mistakes, confessing that his relationship with Hero felt 'too good to be true, right from the beginning, to the point where [he] would sooner believe she had run off with another guy than have feelings for [him].'¹¹⁹ Hero appears, healthy after all, and she and Claudio reconcile. The series' happy ending is completed by Beatrice and Benedick starting a relationship of their

¹¹⁵ Watch Projects, *HERO'S BIRTHDAY | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 9 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uaskh-3yQ7o>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Nothing Much To Do, *Idiots | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMbgjkQTzpM>.

¹¹⁸ Watch Projects, *The Three Seniors | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBZA7fqFcqE>; benaddicktion, *CONFESSION | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugp-xi6Y2Ww>.

¹¹⁹ Watch Projects, *PROJECT V - FOR HERO | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpQaLZ1U6os>.

own, realising in the course of orchestrating the series' resolution that (as their friends rightly predicted) they indeed had feelings for one another.¹²⁰

Aligning with Dena's multi-channel model, it is the videos that *NMTD*'s characters (supposedly) upload to YouTube which serve as the series' main story channels, offering in combination eighty-one episodes charting the triumphs and personal development of the show's ensemble of characters. Alternatively, the posts on Beatrice's Twitter, Hero's Instagram, and Ursula and Pedro's Tumblr blogs expand upon peripheral or neglected elements of the series' fictional storyworld, variously enriching the audiences' understanding of the characters, offering different perspectives on narrative events, and affording audiences the opportunity to interact with the characters and storyworld outside of the times and spaces dictated by the story channel. Lastly, the series' 'official' commodity channels, though relatively scarce, include at the time of writing two t-shirt designs and a replica letterman jacket worn by characters throughout the series, available for purchase through an online store run by the Candle Wasters.¹²¹ Some devoted fans have even taken it upon themselves to create items celebrating their love of the series, such as the pixel designs of *NMTD* characters for sale on the craft website Redbubble.¹²² As in Dena's conceptualisation, these commodities have no effect on the narrative of *NMTD*, but can instead be consumed by devoted audiences as a means of encapsulating and broadcasting their fan affiliations with the series.

In combination, this outline of posted events highlights the unbalanced distribution of *NMTD*'s narrative, exposing its privileging of the audio-visual content posted to YouTube over the story elements spread across Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. Offering the most valuable and authoritative contributions to *NMTD*'s narrative, the videos uploaded to the series' three YouTube channels combine to create a cohesive, stand-alone narrative experience, which may—but need not necessarily—be

¹²⁰ benaddicktion, *BLEURGH | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 22 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6dIbVGUX2k>.

¹²¹ The Candle Wasters, 'The Candle Wasters', *Big Cartel*, accessed 22 August 2016, <http://thecandlewasters.bigcartel.com/>.

¹²² 'NmtD: Gifts & Merchandise', *Redbubble*, accessed 10 June 2016, <http://www.redbubble.com/shop/nmtd>.

supplemented by one's engagement with the characters' profiles across other social media platforms.

Celebrating Social Media Specificities: An Approach to Distributed Adaptations

In its capacity as both a literary adaptation web series and a distributed adaptation, *NMTD* foregrounds the process (and pleasures) of adaptation, 'reconfiguring' an existing work of literature not only *onto* social media but *across* a range of social media platforms. Much as Jenkins observes of transmedia storytelling, this distribution of narrative information necessarily implies that medium-specificity is central to the series' success because

different media involve different kinds of representation. Each medium has different kinds of affordances – the game facilitates different ways of interacting with the content than a book or a feature film. A story that plays out across different media adopts different modalities.¹²³

While for distributed adaptations such as *NMTD*, the focus on specificities switches from mediums to multiple (social media) platforms, the diverse functionalities attached to each similarly inform the particularities of the series' narrative presentation.

Throughout *NMTD*, the style of content posted to YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr reflects 'what [each platform] does best,'¹²⁴ adhering to the affordances of each so as to diversify the narrative contributions made available to the audience from platform to platform. Moreover, to a far greater extent than most other examples of distributed adaptations, the creators of *NMTD* further differentiated these contributions by proactively engaging with the user practices most popular on each platform, modelling their content after that uploaded by the regular users who populate each site. As the next two chapters will explore in more detail, these efforts had the effect of dissolving the boundary between the series' fictional diegesis and the lived world of its audience, both by ascribing real-world social media competencies to its characters and by (consequently) camouflaging their fictional content alongside that posted to the site by real users.

¹²³ Henry Jenkins, 'Transmedia 202: Further Reflections', *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, 1 August 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

¹²⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 96.

In an effort to acknowledge each of the medium-*specificities* involved in *NMTD*, Chapter Three explores the interplay of platform affordances and user-led practices on YouTube, investigating the series' adoption of seven popular video formats as the basis for fictional episodes. Chapter Four then turns to the character profiles curated on Tumblr, Twitter and Instagram, exploring the effect of these social media extensions on the audiences' experience of the fiction. Together, these chapters testify to the need for a more nuanced narratological approach to examples of digital storytelling which adopt mediums not intended for narrative expression as the frameworks for their fictions. In the case of literary adaptation web series in particular, this approach must acknowledge both the (im)balance of information invested across multiple narrative sources, as well as the influence of a variety of social media contexts, so as to appreciate each platform's unique contribution to the audience's experience of the text.

Chapter 3

Immersed in the Timeline, Part I: YouTube

Just as the creators of *LBD* were inspired by the vlogging aesthetics of LonelyGirl15,¹ *NMTD* was strongly influenced by the storytelling techniques introduced and popularised by *LBD*. In addition, to a far greater extent than its predecessor, *NMTD*'s style was informed by its creators' awareness and appreciation of the video-making conventions popular among the YouTube community.² While use of the term 'community' to describe online groups has been highly contested amongst theorists of digital media,³ its usage throughout this chapter at once acknowledges YouTube's own efforts to characterise its users with this term,⁴ and evokes the conceptualisation of online groupings outlined by Nancy Baym. In *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2015), Baym proposes that the ability for digital platforms to host user communities relies upon their reproduction of five qualities that are also central to communities in offline contexts: 'the sense of shared space, shared practice, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal relationships.'⁵ Of particular importance to this chapter is the notion of shared practice, and the extent to which online communities are created and sustained through 'the habitual and usually unconscious practices – routinized behaviors – that group members share.'⁶ Given the multitude of disparate 'subgroups'⁷ of YouTube users, and the conventions and practices unique to each, it is worth clarifying that the groupings most influential for *NMTD* were those born from the site's longstanding vlogging traditions: those YouTubers whose videos

¹ Bernie Su, quoted in Aja Romano, 'Transmedia and the New Art of Storytelling', *The Daily Dot*, 23 October 2012, <http://www.dailydot.com/upstream/transmedia-storytelling-roundtable-bernie-su/>.

² Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'; 'I Just Wanted to Let You Guys Know That I Am...', *The Candle Wasters*, accessed 3 November 2016, <http://thecandlewasters.tumblr.com/post/91671779094/i-just-wanted-to-let-you-guys-know-that-i-am>.

³ For an overview of these debates, see Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015), 83; Dana Rotman and Jennifer Preece, 'The "WeTube" in YouTube – Creating an Online Community Through Video Sharing', *International Journal of Web Based Communities* 6, no. 3 (2010): 319; Malcolm R. Parks, 'Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities', in *A Networked Self Identity: Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2010), 105–23.

⁴ See, for example, 'Community Guidelines – YouTube', accessed 12 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/policyandsafety/en-GB/communityguidelines.html>.

⁵ Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86; see also Parks, 'Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities', 111.

⁷ Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 83.

place a strong emphasis on their own personalities, reveal information about their personal lives, and adopt an interpersonal vlogging style, engaging with their viewers through the screen.

Throughout *NMTD*, a number of video-making conventions popular among these users were referenced and replicated in the videos uploaded to the characters' channels, particularly in the case of Beatrice and Hero's channel, *Nothing Much to Do*. Tellingly, for instance, in the series' second episode, Hero outlines a vision for their channel explicitly shaped by her knowledge of YouTube's most prominent video sub-genres: 'Makeup tutorials!' she enthuses, 'Rants at camera! Oh, um, showing off clothes – shopping hauls! Room tour. Room tour! *Room tour!*'⁸ Indeed, as the series unfolds, the pair's channel plays host to a number of videos reproducing these and other well-known formats, including the first vlog, the 'My First Time' tag, the daily vlog, the room tour, the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag, and the baking 'collab.'

By incorporating popular vlogging formats, styles and behaviours into the narrative's delivery, the creators of *NMTD* successfully characterised their protagonists not simply as vloggers but, more specifically, as *active members* of the YouTube community. Much as Aimée Morrison observes of the online networks of 'mommy bloggers,' active participation on YouTube requires one's assumption of the dual role of viewer and responder/producer, with the latter enacted either by authoring text comments or creating videos in response to others' content. As Morrison argues, users' 'alternations between these roles create non-hierarchical, tightly woven webs of interconnection' which are characterised 'by serial, mutual, and intimate self-disclosure.'⁹ On YouTube, it is through these interconnected user networks that the site's 'aesthetic values, cultural forms, and creative techniques are normalized,' with popular conventions emerging and consolidated 'via the collective activities and judgements of the social network.'¹⁰ In replicating these conventions, *NMTD*'s creators positioned the series' fictional narrative in dialogue with the videos regularly created

⁸ *Nothing Much To Do, A Wild Hero Appears! | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 7 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbyzAlKKDfk>.

⁹ Aimée Morrison, "'Suffused by Feeling and Affect": The Intimate Public of Personal Mommy Blogging', *Biography* 34, no. 1 (2011): 37.

¹⁰ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 61.

and uploaded to the site by real YouTubers, embedding their characters within the site's social networks.

As Burgess and Green observe, '[u]nlike the more obvious social network sites such as Facebook, where social networking is based on personal profiles and "friending" ... in YouTube the video content itself is the main vehicle of communication.'¹¹ Patricia G. Lange uses the term 'videos of affinity' to theorize this dynamic, referring to those YouTube videos which 'attempt to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify or interpellate themselves as the intended viewers of a video.'¹² Lange proposes that videos of affinity function as a key mechanism in YouTube's social networks, framing the production of 'mediated intimacy' as contingent on the users' desire to connect with those they view on-screen.¹³ So as to better chart the oscillations of these affective dynamics, I turn to Kathleen Stewart's conceptualisation of attachment, defined in a 2012 panel discussion with Lauren Berlant as '*attunements* to something; they're labours that take place *in* affects, but [are] sensory, describable not so much as emotions but rather as the force taking form.'¹⁴ These attunements, Stewart explains, are constantly in motion: '[t]hey don't just *add up* to the register of the big picture, but they can accrue, or fail, or turn a corner, or shift.'¹⁵ With its affectual grounding and perpetual fluidity, Stewart's conceptualisation of attachment offers a basis for this chapter's exploration of the relational dynamics native to YouTube as a social media platform, particularly the shared sense of community and belonging, as well as the intense sense of investment, that the platform and its users have the ability to inspire.

This chapter proposes that *NMTD*'s incorporation—and indeed replication—of a selection of YouTube's most popular video formats serve both to characterise its protagonists as proficient, active members of the YouTube community, and to elicit the same relational dynamics evoked by these practices in the real world, consequently

¹¹ Ibid., 54.

¹² Lange, 'Videos of Affinity on YouTube', 71.

¹³ See Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*; Berryman and Kavka, 'The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers'.

¹⁴ Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart, 'Discussion: Forms of Attachment', July 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24p0uUmkHE4>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

attaching them to the series' fictional characters. In contrast to earlier vlog fictions such as LonelyGirl15, this reproduction of real-world vlogging practices was not intended to deceive viewers into believing the series was real. In fact, much as Jandl notes of *LBD*, *NMTD* 'never denied its fictionality,'¹⁶ including disclaimers about the content's fabrication in the description boxes underneath each video,¹⁷ and a thumbnail design which clearly signposted the videos as episodes in a fictional series. Moreover, given the popularity of *LBD* at the time of *NMTD*'s release, it is also possible that viewers were drawn to *NMTD* specifically for its contribution to the literary adaptation web series canon, and were likely well aware, therefore, of the series' fictionality. In light of *NMTD*'s disposition to attract a 'knowing' audience—both the sense of 'knowing' that the series is a work of fiction and 'knowing' the source material which the series adapts¹⁸—this chapter posits that *NMTD*'s replication of popular vlogging practices afforded its viewers the opportunity to experiment with the pleasures of attachment, encouraging them to (knowingly) enjoy and engage with fictional content *as though* it were real.

Like, Comment and Subscribe: Content Videos, Vlogs and Tags

During the eight-month period in which *NMTD* was released, new videos were uploaded to Beatrice and Hero's YouTube channel every Wednesday, recalling the increasingly commonplace—and overtly televisual—convention for YouTubers to release their content in accordance with a weekly upload schedule. By contrast, the videos posted to Benedick's channel (benaddicktion) and the channel shared by Ursula, Verges and Dogberry (The Watch) did not adhere to a regular roster, and were instead updated in accordance with narrative demands.¹⁹ In all, the series featured over eighty episodes—their length ranging from just 25 seconds to nine and a half minutes—which were each expressed in vlog format. For the creators, this format posed some complications to the series' narrative plausibility. As creator Minnie Grace explains, *NMTD* operated under the premise that its 'characters are real. They exist in the real world. This means [the] characters needed reasons to film, edit and upload their videos, because whatever

¹⁶ Jandl, 'Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age', 175.

¹⁷ Admittedly, as Jandl observes, these disclaimers would not have been immediately apparent for viewers linked directly to the video because the 'statements exposing the authenticity of the vlog ... [were] placed so that viewers would only come by the clarification by consciously clicking on the "Show More" button.' See *ibid.*

¹⁸ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 120.

¹⁹ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'.

content they posted could have effects on their lives outside of their YouTube channel.²⁰ In answer, the creators took pains to characterise their protagonists as comfortable with (over-)disclosing information about their lives with the internet.²¹ Fortunately, this characterisation was assisted by the translatability of the characters' portrayals in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the series' theatrical predecessor, to the context of YouTube. As Shakespearean scholar Victor L. Cahn notes, one of the primary themes of *Much Ado* 'is that [the] characters [are] too preoccupied with themselves to appreciate what happens around them.'²² This tension was easily translated to (and likely magnified by) the adaptation's vlog format: in *NMTD*, the protagonists are presented with a creative outlet entirely predicated on the expression of their own self-interests and -preoccupations. From the series' outset, the character's vlogs betray the fact that they, too, are oblivious to the reality of the world around them—much like their clueless theatrical counterparts, as well as the real-world YouTube vloggers on whom they were modelled.

Of the range of video formats included in *NMTD*, the majority fall under YouTube's most popular video type, which I have elsewhere labelled 'content videos.'²³ Content videos 'serve to establish the talents or qualities that YouTubers come to be known for,' and are 'routinely highly polished, featuring high-definition camera footage, semi-professional lighting rigs, obvious signs of editing and sometimes even musical scores.'²⁴ Given the diversity of interests across the YouTube community, content videos vary dramatically in style and content, but generally cluster around (and are related to) the topics most popular across the site, including beauty, gaming, lifestyle, film, education and comedy.

While content videos are employed to publicize users' areas of interest and expertise,²⁵ they are often supplemented by two other video types, which I respectively differentiate as vlogs and 'tag' videos. Vlogs, though still tied to the confessional,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Victor L. Cahn, *Shakespeare the Playwright: A Companion to the Complete Tragedies, Histories, Comedies, and Romances* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 629.

²³ Berryman and Kavka, 'The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers', 310.

²⁴ Ibid., 312.

²⁵ Ibid.

intimate qualities discussed in Chapter One, have recently undergone major stylistic changes. Thanks to the increasing portability and affordability of mobile filming technologies, 'vloggers are no longer tethered to the webcams on their desktop or laptop computers, more frequently using digital and smartphone cameras to capture their lives as they lead them.'²⁶ Replacing early vlogging's focus on retroactive expression with an emphasis on spontaneous self-documentation, the term has recently come to denote the practice of documenting what is happening *right now*, 'routinely featur[ing] commentary about the experiences individuals are having *as they film*.'²⁷ Though this style of mobile vlogging has been most enthusiastically adopted by YouTubers with substantial online followings,²⁸ and has even inspired communities of 'daily vloggers' who upload videos of this type every day, I would argue that its appeal for celebrity, daily and casual vloggers alike rests with the intimate relationships these vlogs are able to facilitate, presenting a portrayal of the rhythms of ordinary life with which viewers are encouraged to relate. Much as Lena Karlsson notes of 'diary blogging,' the mobile vlog's attraction ultimately resides in its depiction of 'the continuous, the regular, [of a] narrative happening alongside one's own life.'²⁹

In addition to vlogs, the YouTube community also favours another video type, the 'tag' video, which substitutes a focus on topical content for an exploration of the YouTuber themselves. Combining vlogging's continued interest in intimate disclosure with content videos' more polished production values, tag videos follow a rigid format or set of rules which, though typically originating from one YouTuber, are consolidated by the tag's circulation throughout the YouTube community.³⁰ Indeed, it is common for these videos to conclude with the YouTuber's recommendation for other users to replicate it, enacting a game of virtual tag which assists the format in proliferating through the site's social networks. Traversing topical boundaries and subgroupings, tag videos are popular across YouTube, affording users an easy way of exploring and revealing more about their off-screen lives and personalities. While these personality-

²⁶ Ibid., 310.

²⁷ Ibid., original emphasis.

²⁸ For an analysis of vlogging as a mechanism of YouTube celebrity, see Berryman and Kavka, 'The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers'.

²⁹ Lena Karlsson, 'Desperately Seeking Sameness', *Feminist Media Studies* 7, no. 2 (2007): 149.

³⁰ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 61.

focussed video formats are extremely important for YouTube celebrities, enabling them to reveal and showcase ‘the reality *behind* the brand,’³¹ they are also regularly employed by individuals not considered ‘YouTube famous,’ attesting to the sense of intimacy and belonging which transpires from one’s participation in YouTube’s communities of practice.

Introduce Yourself: The First Vlog

“And So It Begins...”, the first episode of *NMTD*, opens with a mid-shot of Beatrice sitting cross-legged atop Hero’s bed, giggling as she waves self-consciously at the camera in front of her (see Figure 3).³² ‘Hello, people of the Internet!’ she smiles, placing her hand on her chest, ‘I’m Beatrice.’ Launching into her self-introduction, we quickly discover that Beatrice has recently moved to Auckland, where she will be staying with her cousins as she completes her final year at a new high school; that her favourite school subject is science; that she is a big fan of actor Benedict Cumberbatch; and that she adores her younger cousin, Hero. We also learn much about Beatrice’s family dynamics, and gain a surprisingly well-developed impression of Beatrice herself, with her on-screen performance marked by charisma, confidence and wit.

With its emphasis on self-introduction and self-expression, Beatrice’s first video aligns with a sub-genre of YouTube videos known as the ‘first vlog,’ a common practice among those creating their own YouTube channels.³³ Echoing the conscious and selective process of self-presentation detailed in Erving Goffman’s seminal title *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), first vlogs afford a particularly flexible site for YouTubers’ impression management,³⁴ including a number of facts about the on-screen subject, such as their first name, hobbies, interests, and other details relevant to their daily lives.³⁵ By foregrounding these details, first vlogs assist in acquainting audiences with the personality of the YouTuber they are watching on-screen, creating a

³¹ Berryman and Kavka, ‘The Role of Intimacy in the Celebification of Beauty Vloggers’, 315, original emphasis.

³² Nothing Much To Do, *And So It Begins... / Nothing Much To Do*.

³³ Aymar Jean Christian, ‘Real Vlogs: The Rules and Meanings of Online Personal Videos’, *First Monday* 14, no. 11 (2009), <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2699>.

³⁴ For more detailed analyses of self-presentation in YouTube vlogs, see Maggie Griffith and Zizi Papacharissi, ‘Looking for You: An Analysis of Video Blogs’, *First Monday* 15, no. 1 (29 December 2009), <http://www.ojphi.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2769>; Chih-Ping Chen, ‘Forming Digital Self and Parasocial Relationships on YouTube’, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016): 232–54.

³⁵ Christian, ‘Real Vlogs’.

repository of personal information useful for contextualising the content of any videos they subsequently upload. Aymar Jean Christian also observes that first vlogs are often highly reflexive, commonly including the reasons for a vlogger starting their YouTube channel, and statements about the types of videos they envision their YouTube channel will host.³⁶ By referencing the impetus for the channel’s creation or visions for its future, vloggers can from their very first video differentiate their channel from—and also promote it over—the wealth of others vying for views across the site, promising a particular vlogging approach and style of content which will (hopefully) entice viewers to watch more.

If first vlogs are generally concerned with creating impressions of YouTubers and establishing visions for their channels, it is easy to see how this format lends itself to use in a fictional context. As *NMTD*’s first episode, “And So It Begins...” is responsible for the series’ exposition, tasked with establishing the world of the fiction, creating an impression of the story to come, and, importantly, appealing enough to viewers that they continue watching. Indeed, it is very early in the video that Beatrice establishes the series’ ‘home alone’ premise: with her aunts on an extended honeymoon in Italy, and her parents pursuing new careers in Australia, Beatrice and her older cousin Leo will be



Figure 3. ‘Hello, people of the Internet! I’m Beatrice.’ From “And So It Begins...” Accessed 3/12/16. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn57zw4--D0>

³⁶ Ibid.

'in charge of the house for the next six months.' As Beatrice teases, with adults away, '*anything could happen*,' promising weekly updates of the 'drama' should the viewer return to watch her future uploads. As well as establishing this narrative hook, the video also affords *NMTD* an effective means of characterising its protagonist, drawing on the first vlog's celebration of self-introductions as a way of normalising the episode's concentration on Beatrice's interests, familial structure and personality quirks. Through its focus on these details, Beatrice's first vlog foregrounds the enjoyment of 'being able to consume the autobiographical tales of common people with similar lives'³⁷ to your own, laying a foundation for the audience's attachment by encouraging them to relate to and invest in the life of the (fictional) vlogger they are watching on-screen.

In addition, the conversational tone characteristic of the first vlog format also allows *NMTD* to immediately establish the series' mode of address. As Beatrice waves, laughing, 'Hello, people of the Internet!' she opens *NMTD* with a direct address to the audience which is continued throughout; during her monologue, Beatrice repeatedly adopts second-person pronouns, maintains eye contact with the camera lens, and even pre-emptively answers questions she imagines her audience would ask, were they present. As Andrew Tolson notes, this style of direct address is emblematic of vlogging as a genre, borrowing from earlier traditions of broadcast talk 'to construct co-presence and invite interaction even though[,] of course, none of this is live.'³⁸ This direct address has the additional effect for the social media fiction of traversing the boundary between fiction and reality, immediately acknowledging the audience as interlocutors who exist in the storyworld, and inviting them to form an intimate relation with the character engaging with them through the screen. Curiously, however, at the time that Beatrice records this vlog, the audience she acknowledges does not exist. As Maggie Griffith and Zizi Papacharissi observe, directly appealing to interlocutors who are physically absent at the time of the vlog's recording is a paradox inherent to the form's asynchronous nature.³⁹ However, it is particularly apparent in the case of the first vlog, which is not only created for listeners who are not present, but is, in fact, recorded prior to the vlogger having attracted or amassed an audience at all. Consequently, Beatrice's broad

³⁷ Karlsson, 'Desperately Seeking Sameness'.

³⁸ Andrew Tolson, 'A New Authenticity? Communicative Practices on YouTube', *Critical Discourse Studies* 7, no. 4 (2010): 280.

³⁹ Griffith and Papacharissi, 'Looking for You'; see also Berryman and Kavka, 'Crying on YouTube'.

characterisation of her imagined audience simply as Internet users allows the series to account for all of the individuals who may happen to stumble across the series, immediately, directly and warmly welcoming them to the world of the fiction.⁴⁰

Hero's Voice: The 'My First Time' Tag

The ethos of personal revelation foregrounded in Beatrice's first vlog is echoed in a video uploaded by her cousin Hero halfway through the series. Entitled "My First Time,"⁴¹ it opens with a mid-shot of Hero sitting on her bed, smiling and waving at the camera. 'Hi, guys!' she enthuses, 'This is the "My First Time" tag video, just a bunch of my "firsts" of things. Yeah, I thought it'd be fun, so... let's get started!' As the video progresses, Hero proceeds to recount the stories behind a number of her 'first' experiences, including her first word, pet, kiss and impression of her boyfriend Claudio (see Figure 4).

In title and structure, this video explicitly replicates a tag popular within the YouTube community, which—sparking interest from its provocative title—centres upon confessional, anecdotal accounts of a vlogger's life. Though the exact questions vary from video to video, they generally cluster around the themes of family, early childhood, relationships and social media. As with tag videos more generally, the 'My First Time' format gained popularity from its circulation around the YouTube community. Though popular vlogger Joey Graceffa introduced a similarly premised video entitled "MY FIRST'S TAG!" in 2012,⁴² the format reproduced in *NMTD* can be largely attributed to beauty, lifestyle and parenting vlogger Louise Pentland, who posted a "My First Time" video in June 2013.⁴³ Her video inspired a number of other well-known vloggers to

⁴⁰ Maximiliane Frobenius, 'Audience Design in Monologues: How Vloggers Involve Their Viewers', *Journal of Pragmatics* 72 (2014): 825.

⁴¹ Nothing Much To Do, *My First Time | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 31 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6VdcixZiGQ>.

⁴² Joey Graceffa, *MY FIRST'S TAG!*, accessed 2 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yj2m-y-b79Q>.

⁴³ Sprinkleofglitter, *My First Time | Sprinkle of Glitter*, accessed 2 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZGOL038QhM>.

replicate the format, including Zoe Sugg,⁴⁴ Alfie Deyes,⁴⁵ Marcus Butler,⁴⁶ Jim Chapman,⁴⁷ and Dan Howell,⁴⁸ which in turn motivated its imitation by lesser-known YouTubers across the site. In reference to this process of circulation, Hero's "My First Time" video finishes with a call-to-action for her viewers to create their own versions of the tag: 'If any of you guys want to make a video answering the same questions, you can leave it as a response to this one, and I'll watch it just so I can get to know you guys a bit better.' Though the video response function has since been removed from YouTube's interface, in the comments below Hero's video two fans have provided links to the My First Time videos they made in response, each beginning with the cheerful greeting, 'Hi, Hero!'⁴⁹

Much as the 'My First Time' format assists YouTube audiences in 'getting to know' their favourite vloggers more intimately, in a fictional context this format lends itself to character detail, assisting writers to establish a back-story which extends beyond what has—and may feasibly be—shown on-screen. *NMTD* extends this opportunity for additional characterisation to Hero, utilizing the tag's question and answer format to present the viewers with an array of anecdotal information about her personality, relationships and childhood memories. This choice is intriguing given Hero's under-developed role in the adaptation's source text. As Alexander Leggatt observes, during Hero's courtship with Claudio in *Much Ado*, 'Hero herself has hardly anything in say: she is essentially a figure in the pattern, whose chief dramatic function is to stand there and look beautiful.'⁵⁰ Leggatt further argues that Hero's primary purpose in the play 'is as a figure in a narrative design. Her role is to wait patiently –

⁴⁴ Zoella, *My First Time | Zoella*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jkbr9QLztHA>.

⁴⁵ PointlessBlog, *My First Time*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjt4yyG4bbs>.

⁴⁶ Marcus Butler, *My First Time*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ff7gkiIdPA>.

⁴⁷ Jim Chapman, *MY FIRST TIME!*, accessed 3 November 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbRp1Oszl_U.

⁴⁸ danisnotonfire, *My First Time*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtgVIWEISuc>.

⁴⁹ See Kriz B. Icaza, *My First Time Tag*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Up5CyZmubU>; Sheri S., *My First Time-NMTD*, accessed 3 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETooMg5G3Yk>.

⁵⁰ Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London: Routledge, 2005), 155.

even to disappear – until the narrative itself takes its course, and proves her innocent.’⁵¹ This characterisation is directly contradicted in *NMTD* by the active role Hero takes in creating her own YouTube videos, with the ‘My First Time’ tag in particular affording Hero the opportunity to give voice to her experiences, thoughts and emotions. Hero’s (re)production of the tag thus allows her to lay claim to the agency she is denied in the source play, at once enabling her to craft her own identity within the narrative and supplying the audience with a backstory detailed enough to cement her position as a main character.

Crucially, the elaborate characterisation presented by this video is inseparable from the creators’ efforts to court increased fan attachment to Hero’s character. With its emphasis on retrospective self-disclosure and -exposure, Hero’s ‘My First Time’ tag evokes the affective functionality of the tag more broadly, strengthening the bonds of intimacy between herself and the audience by confiding in them private details about her personal history. As Morrison notes in relation to blogging communities, divulging personal information is one means by which individuals may more deeply embed themselves in online networks. ‘[T]he more that bloggers disclose about their personal



Figure 4. ‘My first pet was a little rabbit. She was adorable and I called her “Cotton Tail” after the Beatrix Potter story.’ From “My First Time.” Accessed 3/12/16.
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6VdcixZiGQ>

⁵¹ Ibid., 161.

lives,' she observes, 'the more tightly bonded they feel to the communities in which they participate, and the happier they feel, generally.'⁵² So too are intimate bonds strengthened for the recipients of this self-disclosure, who through their assumption of the role of trusted confidant, and their accumulation of this private knowledge, come to feel as though they better know (and are thus more strongly connected to) the individual on the other side of the screen.⁵³ It is precisely this intimate dynamic which Hero's tag video attempts to inspire between herself and her viewers. Through the extra characterisation built into the 'My First Time' tag's revelatory format, *NMTD*'s creators lay a foundation for the audience's emotional investment in Hero's character, which will allow for the rumours of Hero's illness and death to strongly resonate with viewers later in the series.

The Mobile Vlog: Capturing the Rhythms of Daily Life

While the majority of *NMTD*'s episodes follow the traditional, sit-and-talk vlogging style adopted in "And So It Begins..." and "My First Time," the series also includes a number of episodes which adopt the mobile vlogging practice recently popularised within the YouTube community. These episodes are each filmed outdoors and place a heightened focus on the characters' actions rather than their thoughts or emotions.

Beatrice posts two such vlogs near the beginning of *NMTD*, documenting her attendance at a school football game where she picnics on the side-line with Hero, Ursula, Meg and Robbie. In "Football Antics: Part One,"⁵⁴ the majority of the action plays out before a camera set up on a tripod, with Bea, Hero and Ursula lounging on a picnic blanket, discussing Hero's crush on Claudio. Halfway through the video, however, we cut to a black title card that reads: 'Everything was going well until...' We then see Hero and Bea in a two-shot close up, where the cousins inform us that 'Leo said that we're not allowed to film the actual game, or *during* the actual game, because he doesn't want our *camera* to get damaged...?' Beatrice, staring deadpan at the camera with one eyebrow raised, responds drily, 'Yeah, but what he *really* meant is that he didn't want us "distracting" the boys from their game. Sexist bastard.' The position of the camera in

⁵² Morrison, 'Suffused by Feeling and Affect', 41.

⁵³ See Berryman and Kavka, 'Crying on YouTube'.

⁵⁴ Nothing Much To Do, *Football Antics: Part One | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VT58mt-xEc>.

this shot, held at a slightly high angle from arm's length by both Bea and Hero, is a familiar convention of vlog format: while the close-up helps to evoke a sense of closeness between viewers and the subject on-screen, the camera's position is also highly practical, allowing for the vlogger's easy movement, high-quality audio recording, as well as advantageous 'selfie' framing. The remainder of the vlog depicts more scenes from Beatrice's afternoon: we see Hero narrating the action on the field, oblivious to the fact Beatrice is filming her, and watch Bea, Hero and Ursula chatting as they attempt to ignore Meg and Robbie's public displays of affection behind the tripod. In "Football Antics: Part Two,"⁵⁵ after a short clip of Verges and Dogberry helping themselves to Beatrice's muffins, the focus of vlog switches from activities on the side-line to a showcase of the group's post-game celebrations. In the long take which comprises the majority of this video, we are first introduced to Pedro, witness Claudio and Hero flirting with each other, and see the first hostile on-screen encounter between Bea and Benedick.

Together, Beatrice's "Football Antics" vlogs provide a glimpse into her lifestyle not afforded by the sit-and-talk vlogging format. Indeed, at the end of the second vlog, when Ben questions why Bea is filming at the football game, Ursula chimes in, 'You wanted to show, like, more of your life, right? 'Cause it'd be boring if you stay inside of your room... Like, [you wanted to show] more of your universe.' As Ursula (rather self-awarely) observes, the mobile vlog format enables Beatrice to reveal to her viewers the world beyond her bedroom, showcasing the rhythms of her life as she leads it. However, Beatrice's vlogs not only invite the viewers to *watch* what is happening in her life; they also encourage the viewers to *experience* Beatrice's life alongside her. This invitation is made especially apparent by the attention Beatrice splits between her interactions with other characters and her YouTube audience: when, for example, in response to Ursula's aforementioned observations, Benedick crudely jokes, 'I could *explode* your universe,' Beatrice rolls her eyes and turns to look directly at the camera as she wails, 'Oh my *God*.' Here, Beatrice implicates the viewer not only as party to the interaction currently unfolding, but also, by extension, present for the entire day's events, heightening the

⁵⁵ Nothing Much To Do, *Football Antics*.

sense of intimacy between herself and her audience by extending an offer to share in her daily adventures.

A markedly different effect is achieved by the vlogs of Beatrice's best friend Ursula, who also posts videos of this type during the series. To her YouTube channel Watch Projects, Ursula uploads a number of filmmaking projects which, at first glance, appear to follow the logic of the mobile vlog. Her portfolio includes "PROJECT II – ONE SHOT,"⁵⁶ where Ursula films in one take a lunchtime argument between Beatrice and Benedick; "PROJECT III – LIFE OF THE PARTY,"⁵⁷ where she compiles a montage of a costume party held at Pedro's house; and "PROJECT VI – MONTAGE,"⁵⁸ the series' epilogue, in which Ursula films all of the characters picnicking atop a windy hill. In each of these vlogs, the viewer is taken beyond the series' largely domestic settings and afforded a perspective of some notable event occurring in the lives of the characters.

Unlike the traditional vlog format, however, Ursula's videos tend to offer a more objective perspective of these events; in her vlogs, Ursula regularly withdraws from the action in favour of filming what her friends are doing around her, adopting a cinematographic style more akin to that used in observational documentaries. This impression of objectivity is limited, however, by the fact that Ursula is often acknowledged by the subjects of her videos, with their actions drawing attention to her physical presence in the scene. In "LIFE OF THE PARTY," for instance, during a long take in which Ursula walks around Pedro's house filming the various party-going cliques, the friends she approaches repeatedly acknowledge her presence, looking, smiling and waving directly at the camera. Though, as such interactions make clear, we are still experiencing the party through a particular character's perspective, the production of Ursula's vlogs nonetheless involves her taking a step back from the action. As her videos attest, she is more interested in filming events than participating in them.

This perspective is crucial for the development of *NMTD*'s narrative. Throughout the series, the vlogs of the series' protagonists Beatrice and Benedick offer competing,

⁵⁶ Watch Projects, *PROJECT II - ONE SHOT | Nothing Much To Do*.

⁵⁷ Watch Projects, *PROJECT III - LIFE OF THE PARTY | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 9 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcy3VrwNLw0>.

⁵⁸ Watch Projects, *PROJECT VI - MONTAGE | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KqWQSSAwS4>.

subjective sources of narrative information, reflecting each characters' unique perspectives, biases and vanities. So as to reconcile these biases, the objective cinematographic style adopted in Ursula's vlogs offers the audience a perspective of the storyworld as it exists outside of the characters' heads. Often, this has the effect of revealing information to the audience not yet realised by the characters themselves. In "ONE SHOT," for example, Ursula's long-take documentation of the group's lunch hour makes explicit the compatibility of Beatrice and Benedick, highlighting their wit and intelligence as equally matched. In this example, well before it is acknowledged by any of the characters, Ursula's vlogs reveal to the audience that Beatrice and Benedick are, indeed, 'perfect for each other.'⁵⁹ If, as in the series' source text, the primary folly of *NMTD*'s protagonists is their preoccupation 'with their own needs and desires,'⁶⁰ Ursula's daily vlogs present an alternative, objective viewpoint of the groups' daily routines which enables the audience to see what the characters cannot.

Hero's Room Tour and the Intimacy of Domestic Space

In the vision Hero outlines for her YouTube channel early in the series, we learn that the video format she is most excited about filming is the 'room tour'—indeed, after first mentioning it, she repeats the phrase with increasing enthusiasm three more times.⁶¹ It is in the 'extra content' video "Sci-fi Room Tour" released halfway through the series that Hero finally gets her wish.⁶² Set to a melodic guitar instrumental, the room tour involves a montage of close-ups of items found around Hero's bedroom (see Figure 5). The handheld camera pans across the array of trinkets, jewellery and books stored on her chest of drawers, and slowly pulls focus as it lingers on the photographs, posters and fairy lights hanging over her bed. Where once these items were only visible from afar, blurred by soft focus as Beatrice and Hero sat filming in the foreground, the room tour format allows the viewers to get up-close-and-personal with each of Hero's belongings, inviting them near enough to read the hands on her two pocket watches and the aged spine of her hardback copy of *The Secret Garden* (1911).

⁵⁹ Watch Projects, *PROJECT IV - MAKEUP BLOOPERS* | *Nothing Much To Do*.

⁶⁰ Cahn, *Shakespeare the Playwright*, 629.

⁶¹ *Nothing Much To Do, A Wild Hero Appears!* | *Nothing Much To Do*.

⁶² *Nothing Much To Do, Sci-Fi Room Tour* | *Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 15 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsUNHZq7fDM>.

With its soft lighting, inquisitive cinematography and quirky soundtrack, Hero's room tour fits neatly among the nearly five million others returned by YouTube's internal search function. There are strong parallels to be drawn, for instance, between Hero's video and the immensely popular room tour posted by prominent beauty and lifestyle YouTuber Bethany Mota, which has over 10 million views at the time of writing.⁶³ Bethany's video similarly features footage shot by a handheld camera, and largely consists of extreme close-ups which afford the audience a close view of all of the small curiosities around her bedroom. The two videos also share an emphasis on camera movement, with the camera's gaze echoing that of an inquisitive visitor's. When Bethany is looking at the items her bookshelf, for example, she slowly pans her camera along the length of each shelf, allowing the viewer to peer at all of the items it holds. Bethany also narrates as she films, providing a backstory for each of the items and further explaining their personal relevance, though this characteristic is not shared by Hero's room tour, which is set to an acoustic soundtrack without any verbal contributions. Visually, however, the videos' shared emphasis on the vlogger's belongings serves to foreground the format's main premise that, 'by sharing knowledge

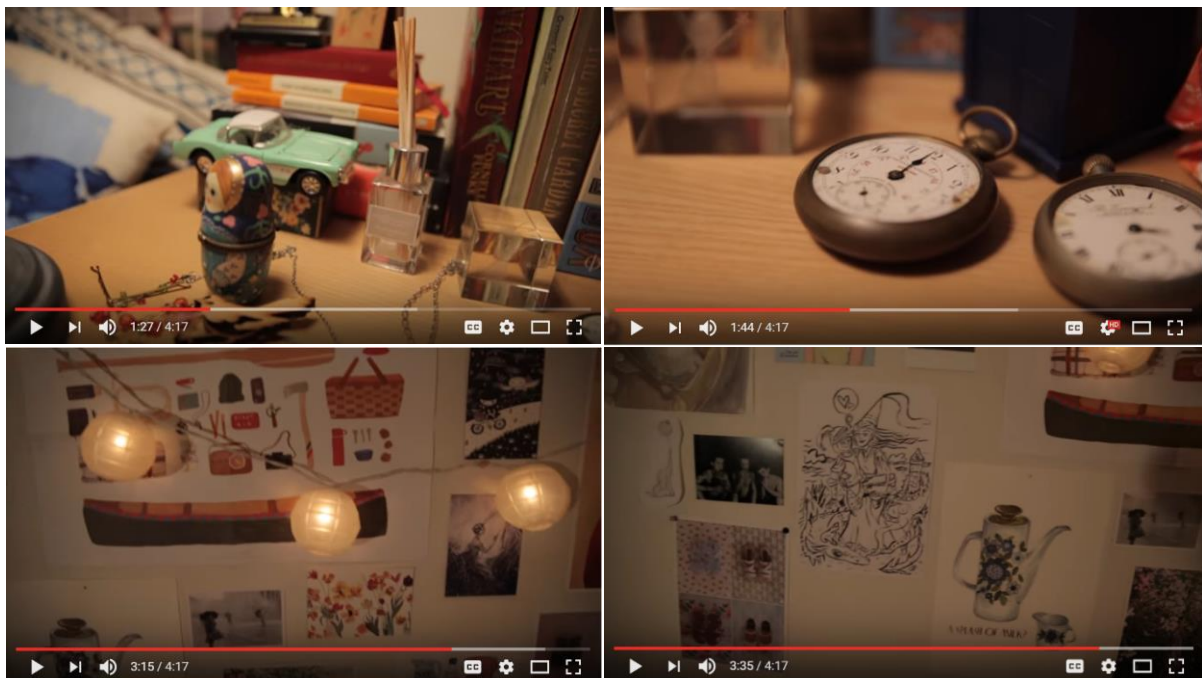


Figure 5. 'Hi, everyone! I thought tonight was an ideal time to give you a little room tour.' Four moments from "Sci-fi Room Tour." Accessed 3/12/16. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsUNHZq7fDM>

⁶³ Bethany Mota, *ROOM TOUR!!! (Macbarbie07)*, accessed 26 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xm4uXo5894>.

about the items located in your bedroom, others can get to know you as well as—and perhaps even better than—they would through verbal introduction.’⁶⁴

Made explicit by its ‘extra content’ label, Hero’s room tour is not a vehicle for plot development, but rather offers an additional opportunity for characterisation. To much the same effect as Bethany’s room tour, Hero’s video offers viewers a visual representation of her personality, articulated via a stylistic display of her most treasured possessions. However, unlike Bethany’s video, which unashamedly explores every nook and cranny of her teenage bedroom (and even contains lingering shots of the contents of her underwear drawer), Hero’s room tour only showcases the wall hangings and chest of drawers with which we are already familiar as regular viewers of the Nothing Much to Do channel; the opportunity to explore the bedroom beyond the conventional framing of Beatrice and Hero’s videos is denied to us. In this respect, Hero’s room tour operates much as a theatre set tour might: inviting you onto the stage to inspect in closer detail the props too small to see from your seat, but ultimately unable to extend the fantasy of the fictional world beyond the proscenium arch.

Despite these limitations, Hero’s room tour succeeds in evoking the relational dynamics which constitute the format’s main appeal. As in the most popular examples of this format, Hero’s room tour features subjective cinematography, which invites and unites the camera’s gaze with that of the curious spectator. Importantly, this gaze is lent an increased sense of familiarity due to the vlogger’s control of the camera; to produce a room tour, the vlogger must cinematographically inspect a highly familiar place as though it were unfamiliar, inviting the viewer to inhabit their current physical space through the unification of their perspectives. In Hero’s room tour, this sense of spatial intimacy is perhaps most pronounced during the sequence which showcases in close-up the posters hanging over her bed. The sequence’s highly controlled camera movements suggest that it was filmed by someone kneeling on Hero’s mattress, effectively situating the audience in the same position and thereby inviting them, too, onto Hero’s bed. As this brief example suggests, the cinematographic conflation of gazes characteristic of the room tour format serves to facilitate a sense of intimacy between a vlogger and their audience ultimately inseparable from the intimate spaces they together explore.

⁶⁴ Berryman and Kavka, ‘The Role of Intimacy in the Celebification of Beauty Vloggers’, 312.

Beauty and the Beast: The ‘My Boyfriend Does My Makeup’ Tag

Among those YouTube users known as the ‘beauty group,’⁶⁵ the makeup tutorial is undoubtedly the most popular video type. Promising to teach the viewer how to achieve a particular makeup ‘look,’ makeup tutorials each follow the same structure: progressing from bare-faced to full-faced, the beauty vlogger applies their makeup, narrating their actions either directly to the camera or through the use of voice-over, acknowledging each product they use and showcasing their technique using intimate cinematography such as mid- and extreme close-ups.⁶⁶ In “Makeup Tutorial feat. A Special Guest!” Hero sets the scene for her own version of this format: ‘Sorry about my naked face and messy hair, but today’s video is a makeup tutorial! I thought I’d just show you how I do my very basic, everyday look.’⁶⁷ After a jump cut, we see Hero holding a foundation brush in her hand. She points at the camera and continues: ‘Okay, so I’ve got the viewfinder open, just next to the camera here, so I can do *sneaky filming techniques* so you guys can have the clearest view of what—’ At this moment, a disembodied voice calls ‘Hero?’ from the far left of the screen, and Claudio enters, holding cups of tea for them both. After another cut, we see a two-shot of Hero and Claudio sitting next to each other on the floor. ‘Okay, so, change of plan,’ Hero explains, grinning at the camera, ‘I’ve convinced dear Claudio here to do a makeup tutorial on my face, and, yeah, I suppose this is one of those “My Boyfriend Does My Makeup” videos.’

Here, Hero references a tag video highly popular among YouTube beauty group: as its name suggests, the ‘My Boyfriend Does My Makeup’ tag involves a (typically female) beauty vlogger receiving a makeover from her (male) partner. As I have elsewhere described, ‘the primary source of interest (and comedy)’ in these videos ‘is the ... males’ cluelessness about the cosmetics he applies to his female partner.’⁶⁸ Because the beauty vlogger is forbidden to inform their partner of the correct use or application techniques for the cosmetics, the tutorials most often finish disastrously, with the beauty vlogger modelling a makeup look markedly different from those she typically wears. Unlike other popular videos in the beauty group, the focus of this

⁶⁵ Ibid., 308.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 312.

⁶⁷ Nothing Much To Do, *Makeup Tutorial Feat. A Special Guest! | Nothing Much To Do*.

⁶⁸ Berryman and Kavka, ‘The Role of Intimacy in the Celebrification of Beauty Vloggers’, 314.

format is not on providing replicable makeup looks, but rather on showcasing the dynamics of the relationship between the vlogger and their romantic partner.⁶⁹

In *NMTD*, the ‘My Boyfriend Does My Makeup’ format serves as the backdrop for the first one-on-one interaction we witness between Hero and Claudio, just after the pair have officially started dating. Throughout the video, as Claudio fumbles with Hero’s makeup collection—liberally applying the wrong shade of foundation, eyeshadow *underneath* her eyes, and lipstick to rival Batman’s nemesis the Joker—we are reminded of their burgeoning romance by repeated displays of physical intimacy between the two. After Claudio has applied Hero’s foundation, for example, he realises that the liquid has leaked into her eyes. Attempting to blot it away with a tissue, he repeatedly whispers, ‘I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,’ and the two lean together, giggling at his mishap. Similar moments occur repeatedly throughout the makeover, highlighting both Claudio’s cosmetic ineptitude and the bonding which transpires from his mistakes. At the end of the makeover, this intimacy is even more pronounced. After Claudio declares that his ‘masterpiece is complete,’ Hero jokingly points to something on his cheek. When he turns so that she may better see it, Hero quickly leans in and kisses him, smearing his cheek with the same lipstick he has just gratuitously applied to her face. Indeed, soon thereafter, following a jump cut from the two staring intensely at each other, Claudio also sports the remnants of the red lipstick on his lips, betraying a moment of physical intimacy perhaps *too* intimate to make the video’s final cut.

In addition to these displays of physical intimacy, Hero’s ‘My Boyfriend Does My Makeup’ tag also serves to foreground the emotional intimacy between the two, a notion perhaps best illustrated by the moments subsequent to the makeover’s reveal. When Hero is handed a mirror to see the finished makeup look, she recoils in horror, quickly closing the compact to cover her face with both hands (see Figure 6). ‘It’s horrifying! [I’m] a monster!’ she wails, shying away from Claudio’s gaze. In response, Claudio gently takes Hero’s hands in his, and good-naturedly (if half-heartedly) denies her comments. ‘No, you look pretty! You look beautiful, you look really pretty,’ he gushes, cementing his reassurances by kissing her on the forehead. We then jump cut to Hero, with arms outstretched, cradling Claudio’s face in her hands. ‘Okay, the fact you’d

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*

still kiss me now...' she turns to look the camera, using her right hand to gesture back and forth between herself and Claudio, 'it means a lot for our relationship, I think.' This exchange epitomizes the emotional crux of the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag: no matter how terrible (or terrifying) the results of the makeover, the partner must reaffirm his adoration for the vlogger, stressing both the strength of their relationship and its grounding in a connection based on more than physical attraction.

With its focus on displays of physical and emotional intimacy, the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' format places centre stage the dynamics of the relationship between the vlogger and her romantic partner. What's more, by embedding these intimate moments within a tutorial format which encourages a conversational tone and a direct address to the audience, the tag effectively facilitates an extension of this intimacy to the viewers, inviting and implicating them as party to the pair's private moments. Aligning with Misha Kavka's conceptualisation of 'technologies of intimacy,' this evocation of spatial and temporal closeness is 'inseparable from emotional proximity, or the capacity of the camera to make me *feel* as if I am there, to make me care about the event, and to draw me into an intimate relation with those in the frame.'⁷⁰ In the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag, the mechanics of this intimate relation are effectively distributed



Figure 6. 'Oh my God, Claudio! What have you done to me?!' From "Makeup Tutorial feat. A Special Guest!" Accessed 3/12/16. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_h2P898q9k

⁷⁰ Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, 6.

between the viewer and *two* on-screen subjects, implicating all three in a triangulation of intimacy which encourages the audience's heightened investment in both the characters and their romance.

Cooking Up Chemistry: The Baking 'Collab'

This intimate triangulation is also present in a baking tutorial uploaded by Hero and Beatrice halfway through the series, though the tenor of its affective relations are familial, not romantic, in nature. "How To Be A Hero In The Kitchen" begins with a wide shot of Hero and Beatrice standing behind their kitchen bench (see Figure 7).⁷¹ As Hero soon explains, the 'vlog is going to be all about cooking, and the food [they] are going to make' for her sixteenth birthday party. 'Yes!' Beatrice adds sarcastically, 'And you're all going to be *so* jealous of our *wonderful* cooking skills, and all the *beautiful* things we make for your Sweet Sixteenth Birthday, oh my god, I'm *so excited – chocolate!*' After Hero playfully elbows her teasing cousin in the arm, we cut to the two attempting a recipe for chocolate chip cookies.

Throughout the video, Hero verbally identifies each ingredient she adds to the mixture, and annotations of their measurements appear on-screen as she explains how she intends to use them. If the viewer prefers, they may also find the cookie recipe in the description box below the video, complete with helpful addendums from Hero about the changes she made to her own mixture. Each of these elements serve to situate the video firmly within the canon of YouTube baking tutorials, a sub-genre explicitly derived from television cooking demonstrations.⁷² While there are many baking tutorials on YouTube which solely focus on the baking process, it is not uncommon for creators to enhance these presentations by augmenting their focus on the host's personality. Such a combination is particularly prominent in instances where the tutorials are produced by individuals without professional cooking expertise or qualifications, such as YouTube's so-called 'lifestyle vloggers,' among whom the baking tutorial is a popular video format. The baking tutorials of these vloggers often begin with an emphasis on the recipe's personal significance to them, or feature anecdotal stories throughout, in both cases accentuating the relationship between the vlogger's life and the baking process, rather

⁷¹ Nothing Much To Do, *How To Be A Hero In The Kitchen | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 20 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsOdiRYFvWI>.

⁷² See Keri Matwick, 'Storytelling and Synthetic Personalization in Television Cooking Shows', *Journal of Pragmatics* 71 (2014): 151–59.

than laying claim to any expertise in its execution. In “How to Be a Hero,” for instance, Hero remarks at the video’s outset that the tutorial serves not only as the routine weekly update for the Nothing Much to Do channel, but also as an excuse to advance the preparations for her birthday party, explicitly tying the tutorial to the events of her daily life. In her analysis of television cooking shows, Keri Matwick observes that the personal anecdotes used to frame the recipes serve both ‘to establish credibility for the chef and create intimacy between the show host and audience.’⁷³ Such is also the case for lifestyle vloggers’ baking tutorials, where, despite no formal training, anecdotes can nonetheless assist in emphasising the vlogger’s ‘credibility’ through reference to their previous baking experience, and facilitate a sense of intimacy with the audience through the paired emphasis on personal disclosure and the convention of direct address.

In *NMTD*, this intimacy is emphasised all the more by the video’s double host arrangement, a commonplace convention of YouTube’s ‘baking collab’ format. In such videos, two YouTube personalities come together to collab(orate) on the production of a single baking tutorial, reframing the video’s emphasis on a single vlogger to—like the ‘My Boyfriend Does My Makeup’ tag—a showcase of the dynamics between the two. A popular example of this video type is “Baking Macarons with Tanya,” a baking tutorial



Figure 7. ‘We’ve got everything laid out on the bench...’ From “How To Be A Hero In The Kitchen.” Accessed 3/12/16. Accessed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsOdiRYFvWI>

⁷³ Ibid., 151.

with over four million views which features beauty and lifestyle vloggers Zoe Sugg and Tanya Burr.⁷⁴ The tutorial's focus on the vloggers' friendship is highlighted from the beginning of the video, where Zoe welcomes her audience and introduces her guest. Standing next to Tanya behind a table adorned with baking tools and ingredients, Zoe waves, 'Hello, everyone and welcome back! Today I am joined with [sic] *Tanya Burr!*' At this moment, Zoe reaches out and pulls Tanya's face towards her so that two are standing cheek-to-cheek. 'Hello!' Tanya grins, and the two hold the pose for a moment, smiling for the camera. As they untangle, Zoe looks directly at the camera and confesses, 'I love her,' before the pair start discussing the macaron recipe they intend to attempt. From the tutorial's outset, the pair make clear that the video's focus is not the baking process, but rather the relationship between them, their co-presence and collaboration.

This is also the case for Beatrice and Hero's baking tutorial, where the baking is overshadowed by the spectacle of the cousins bonding. While Hero is determined in her cookie-making efforts throughout, her attempts at professionalism are repeatedly undermined by Beatrice, who struggles to finely chop the chocolate, crack an egg, and accurately measure the vanilla essence. In each instance, we see Beatrice laughing at her own mistakes, and Hero's good-humoured attempts at correcting her cousin's errors. The dynamics of their relationship are perhaps most pronounced, however, after the two have finished preparing the first batch of cookie dough. As Hero starts clearing the baking equipment away, Beatrice attempts to sneak a taste. When Hero notices and scolds her for doing so, Beatrice mumbles around the mixture, 'I don't have anything in my mouth, what are you talking about?' 'I'll give you ten dollars if you can whistle right now,' Hero shoots back, prompting Beatrice to try (and fail) to whistle, and the pair to dissolve into laughter. When Hero later moves the mixture to the other side of the kitchen, away from Beatrice's reach, Beatrice makes an attempt to retrieve it: ducking behind her cousin, Beatrice rushes towards the bowl, but Hero turns around just in time, grabbing Bea around the waist and pulling her back, the pair laughing together as they return to their positions at the bench. Throughout the tutorial, as in "Baking Macarons with Tanya," the camera's gaze repeatedly lingers on the moments which

⁷⁴ Zoella, *Baking Macarons with Tanya* | Zoella, accessed 30 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4hlSsUmEYA>.

highlight the tenderness of the cousins' relationship: their inside jokes, their witty tête-à-têtes, and their physical comfort with one another.

In effect, these familial displays introduce an affective triangulation reminiscent of that established in the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag, whereby the intimate relations between the on-screen pair are extended to the viewer. However, the baking collab evokes this triangulation to a decidedly different effect. Rather than situating the viewer as a voyeuristic observer of the pair's intimate exchanges, the intimacy invested in the familiarity and ease of the cousins' interactions instead foregrounds what we might call *modelled relationality*, offering the audience a glimpse of the bond they too could share with the characters were they present in the scene. In this sense, the spectacle of intimacy foregrounded by the baking collab format enables *NMTD* not simply to showcase the relationship between two of its leading characters, but also to model a level of attachment between the characters to which the viewers should themselves aspire.

This sense of intimacy is consolidated by the subjective cinematography used to film the second half of "How to Be a Hero." In an effort to distract Beatrice from the temptation of the cookie dough, Hero tells her cousin to 'get the camera off the tripod and do some arty close-ups' of her making another batch. Beatrice acquiesces, and for the next two minutes we see a montage of the baking process, watching Hero cream the butter, add the vanilla essence and sift the flour, all documented in extreme close-up. If the first half of the video echoes the triangulation of intimacy present in the 'My Boyfriend Does My Makeup' tag, the second half borrows the spatial intimacy established in Hero's room tour, compounding the earlier display of the scene's relational allure with a visual invitation which effectively situates the audience within it. Drawing viewers close enough to peer over the edges of the baking bowls, the use of subjective, close-range cinematography in the second half of "How To Be A Hero" has the effect of physically situating the viewer within the scene, aligning Beatrice's mediated gaze with the audience's to implicate them as welcome participants in the cousins' baking adventures.

Nothing Much to Do: "An Homage to Vlogging"

On their official Tumblr blog, in response to a fan message complimenting the series' 'authenticity,' the Candle Wasters explain that they purposefully designed *NMTD* to feel

'pretty realistic,' recounting that in preparation for the series they 'spent time watching webseries and vlogseries ... [and] a whole bunch of vloggers, ones we've always admired and others that we thought might vlog in a way one of our characters might.'⁷⁵ This research, they explain, was necessary because while *NMTD* was 'first and foremost an adaptation of one of [their] favourite Shakespeare plays,' it was also 'an homage to vlogging.'⁷⁶ As this chapter attests, *NMTD*'s creators enacted this homage by repeatedly incorporating the conventions, behaviours and aesthetics most popular within YouTube's vlogging community into the expressive style of the series' narrative. While their primary focus in this undertaking was on the series' episodes, which all adopt a vlogging style if not a specific YouTube format, the creators also engaged with a number of YouTube's other 'social affordances,'⁷⁷ authoring video descriptions and posting comments to the videos on their characters' behalf.⁷⁸ In so doing, the series' creators succeeded in blurring the boundary between fiction and reality, not by deceiving viewers into believing that the series was real, but rather by evoking the relational dynamics invested in these actual formats and behaviours, thereby allowing fans to knowingly engage with the series *as though* it were real. In this sense, *NMTD*'s engagement with YouTube's user practices effectively characterises the series as what we might call a *real-ized fiction*; that is, a fiction which was *made* real through the evocation and ascription of real-world relationality to its characters and their stories.

⁷⁵ 'I Just Wanted to Let You Guys Know That I Am...'

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Parks, 'Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities', 109.

⁷⁸ These comments are documented in a fan-made archive of all of the series' narrative elements. See 'NMTD+'.

Chapter Four

Immersed in the Timeline, Part II: Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr

While *NMTD*'s YouTube channels serve as the main site of the series' narrative, the creators also curated character profiles across a number of other social network sites to tell the story: Beatrice was given a Twitter account (@beatricetheduke), Hero used Instagram (@herotheduke), and Ursula (watchprojects) and Pedro (all-round-great-guy) both had blogs on Tumblr. Between videos, the creators would upload content to these accounts providing further information about significant narrative events, more details about the protagonists' personalities, and micronarratives about the happenings of the characters' everyday lives. Hyperlinks to each of these social media profiles were regularly promoted in the description boxes featured underneath each episode, urging the series' audience to engage with them in addition to viewing the content uploaded to the series' three YouTube channels. Aligning with Dena's multi-channel storytelling model (as discussed in Chapter Two), these social media profiles each operated as 'storyworld channels' for the series: secondary narrative sources which offered more information about elements of the story overlooked or neglected in the primary narrative, but which were not in themselves crucial for narrative development.¹ Indeed, as creator Elsie Bollinger explains, these profiles were used to provide the audience with 'extra content. [They] didn't necessarily *further* the story, but [they] created the *world* for the characters.'²

Crucially, there is a thin distinction between the 'world [of] the characters' to which Bollinger here refers and the lived world of the series' audience, bridged, in fact, by the role played by social media in both. In distributed adaptations such as *NMTD*, social media functions not only as the series' sole storytelling medium, employed to convey the series' narrative development to its audience, but also constitutes part of the series' storyworld, utilized within the diegesis as a space where the characters may both act and interact. This notion is central to Jessica Seymour's classification of the characters of literary adaptation web series as 'textual bodies' who exist 'in the online environment as a conglomeration of social media profiles and activity, which [together]

¹ Dena, 'Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling'.

² Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'.

create an image or schema of [them].³ By repurposing the non-narrative medium of social media as a site for fictional storytelling, moreover, distributed adaptations effectively refashion social media platforms into spaces *co-inhabited* by the characters' 'textual bodies' and real-world users, simultaneously creating storyworlds for and out of the lives of their audience. Thus if social media profiles and content are, as Bollinger argues, utilized to create the world of the characters in distributed adaptations, this world is not so far from our own—rather, it is a storyworld we already inhabit and, as this chapter will further detail, a world in which we are invited to participate.

As well as enriching the audience's understanding of the series' storyworld, I would argue that the most significant function of *NMTD*'s social media channels is their capacity to enhance the audience's *experience* of the series. As for distributed adaptations more generally, the particulars of this experience depend upon which of the two main modes of temporal engagement the viewer assumes: whether they enjoy the series as a *live experience*, following the fiction as it develops during its initial release, or conversely, as a *retroactive experience*, should they discover or engage with the series following its narrative conclusion. In the case of the latter, for instance, audiences may access the series in the form of a YouTube playlist curated by the Candle Wasters, available on each of the three YouTube channels created for the series. Here, the creators have aggregated and ordered all of the episodes from the series' YouTube channels, affording a viewing experience not unlike Raymond William's seminal theorization of television flow,⁴ with YouTube's autoplay function facilitating a continuous, uninterrupted (and likely full-screen) viewing experience of all the episodes in the series. In this retroactive viewing experience, storyworld channels are relegated to additional content which may (but must not necessarily) be discovered and accessed following the viewers' consumption of the story.

By contrast, *live* experiences of distributed adaptations implicate viewers as followers of an unfolding and continually updating narrative, a notion central to Kuznetsova's observation that '[s]tory-telling online is not just a literary text; it is a

³ Seymour, 'Writing Across Platforms: Adapting Classics Through Social Media', 107.

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

performance [where] the story is being created line by line.⁵ In *NMTD*, this narrative performance involved an array of YouTube vlogs, tweets, Instagram photos and Tumblr posts; live viewers witnessed the gradual accumulation of these updates, watching as a digital archive of the characters' lives took form. Unlike retroactive experiences, live viewings foreground the process of narrative revelation, forcing viewers to consider the temporality of and between these narrative fragments, as well as the information they contain. Thus while YouTube episodes may also figure as a live viewer's primary source of narrative information, the delay between video uploads week-to-week becomes significant, as does the time of the videos' upload, and its relation to other fragmented content recently uploaded to the characters' social media pages. I argue that it is this live accumulation of narrative information which figures as the primary motivator for viewers to engage with the series' storyworld channels. By subscribing to (or at least regularly checking) the characters' social media profiles, eager viewers can override the gaps between YouTube vlogs, receiving and accessing additional narrative content as they await the next episodic instalment.⁶ In this live viewing experience, updates to the characters' social media profiles actively contribute to the impression that the story is unfolding in the same time frame as the audience watch.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of the influence of these social media extensions on *NMTD*'s live narrative experience was the fan-dubbed 'radio silence' orchestrated by its creators leading up to the story's climax. In the latter half of the series, Beatrice and Hero's YouTube videos repeatedly referenced Hero's forthcoming sixteenth birthday party, an event scheduled to take place on 16 August 2014. On the night of the party, Hero posted a number of pictures to her Instagram account, including a close-up of her birthday cake, and various portraits of herself, Claudio, Leo and Beatrice before the other guests arrived. On Twitter, Beatrice live-tweeted the beginning of the night, posting a picture with her friend Meg and announcing that Ursula had arrived with her camera in-hand. However, after six o'clock, the cousins' social media profiles went quiet. For a week thereafter, the characters made no posts on social media, with no new videos, pictures nor tweets uploaded to their accounts, and no explanation of what had happened that night. This 'radio silence' was the cause of

⁵ Kuznetsova, 'Social Network Services as Fiction Generating Platform', 274, emphasis added.

⁶ This concept has been discussed in relation to serial television programming by Jason Mittell in *Complex TV*, 165-205.

much angst among the *NMTD* fandom, with many viewers flocking to Tumblr to lament the lack of updates. As creator Minnie Grace recounts, ‘Even [the] actors and [creators] stopped using social media for [the] week, which really freaked people out.’⁷ While they awaited new information, *NMTD*’s fan base busied themselves by writing new pieces of fan fiction, theorizing with each other about future narrative events, creating more graphics and fan vids, and uploading selfies of themselves with the caption ‘#Hero Duke Defense Squad.’⁸ This increased fan output makes clear the creators’ success in inspiring strong fan attachment to the series through their use of social media. In lieu of new narrative updates, the fans redirected the relationality elicited by the series’ otherwise reliable online presence towards each other, in turn strengthening the bonds of community between them through an increased focus on group dialogue, support and collaboration.

Curiously, as Grace notes, the dramatic impact of the series’ radio silence was exacerbated by the series’ status as an adaptation. Attested to by the circulation of the ‘#Hero Duke Defense Squad’ hashtag in the lead-up to the party, viewers familiar with the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* expected the night to be an important narrative event because they had surmised ‘that Hero’s birthday was our version of the wedding scene in *Much Ado* ... where she gets left at the altar and “dies.”’⁹ Playing into this knowledge, the creators opted to delay the revelation of the party’s events, holding off on appeasing their viewers’ curiosity until a week later, when two new videos were released: the first an eclectic montage filmed at the party with a cellphone camera, uploaded by aspiring sleuths Verges and Dogberry to the Watch Projects channel;¹⁰ and the second, a long take of the night’s events filmed by a mystery guest on Ursula’s camera, which purportedly presented an ‘unbiased point of view’ of the night’s conflict.¹¹ It was thus not until 22 August that fans learned of the dramatic confrontation between Claudio and Hero, witnessing first-hand his public shaming of her supposed (and unfounded) infidelity. In this example, *withholding* content from social media was

⁷ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, ‘How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries’.

⁸ These posts may be accessed using a Tumblr search for posts tagged #nmttd prior to August 22, 2014. See <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/nmttd?before=1408656920>

⁹ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, ‘How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries’.

¹⁰ Watch Projects, *Evidence. | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 6 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP1fAZHkEAY>.

¹¹ Watch Projects, *HERO’S BIRTHDAY | Nothing Much To Do*.

employed as a storytelling tool by the series' creators, heightening dramatic tension for live viewers by foiling their reliance on these channels for extra narrative information. Needless to say, the suspense this technique engendered is not experienced by retroactive viewers, for whom these videos are available and easily accessed. As this example suggests, it is for live viewers that the series' storyworld channels hold most value, not simply offering viewers additional sources of narrative information, but in fact incorporating the gradual revelation (or denial) of these contributions into a performance of what we might call *distributed liveness*. Accordingly, this chapter discusses *NMTD*'s social media extensions specifically in relation to the series' live viewing experience, enacted by the Candle Wasters from 23 March to approximately 4 November 2014.

Examining both the additional characterisation and narrative experience afforded by the series' social media extensions, this chapter will extend the argument that *NMTD* excels in repurposing the relational dynamics of social media as a way of enhancing its audience's engagement with the fiction. As in Chapter Three, this argument is grounded in the assertion that the social media behaviours ascribed to *NMTD*'s characters were modelled after those commonplace across each platform, blurring the boundary between fiction and reality by producing content audiences were able to relate to as though it were real. Echoing Kavka's position on the value of reality television, what is important here is not necessarily the grounding of the content in actuality, but rather how the content can *feel* real even in spite of its advertised fictionality—in other words, its capacity to evoke a sense of reality which may be 'known or measured through affective responses.'¹² In order to better understand how *NMTD*'s social media content 'feels real,' this chapter will closely pair examples from *NMTD*'s Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr accounts with recent scholarship on each platform, investigating how the series' creators drew on popular conventions and practices to evoke the relational dynamics of real-world social media usage within a fictional context. After first exploring how the series' storyworld channels were employed to present its characters as 'real' people, this chapter will examine how the creators' success in this regard also informed their efforts to portray the characters as

¹² Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, 23.

'micro-celebrities,'¹³ to 'talk back' to their audience, and to cultivate fan communities around the series. In what follows, I begin theorising the effect of employing social media profiles as narrative channels on the viewers' engagement with the fiction, accounting for the temporal and spatial flexibility afforded by the series' distributed narrative structure.

Characterising the Characters of NMTD as 'Real'

In its curation of character profiles across SNS such as Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, *NMTD* effectively establishes 'web footprints' for its characters, just 'as if they were real people.'¹⁴ Indeed, throughout the series, the activity enacted on each of these profiles recalls and aligns with that of real-world users, exemplified, in particular, by the characters' ongoing 'lifestreaming' efforts, a concept defined by Jessica E. Mullen as 'the act of documenting and sharing aspects of [one's] daily existence online.'¹⁵ This practice is perhaps most strongly realized by Hero's Instagram and Beatrice's Twitter accounts, where the characters regularly posted updates about their thoughts and documented the events of their day-to-day lives. Often, these life updates were linked to the content of the pair's YouTube videos, as when Hero uploaded photos of herself and Beatrice with captions revealing they had just made a video (see Figure 8), or when, after Beatrice announced that she had lost her cell-phone in her video "First World Coat-Hangers,"¹⁶ she tweeted about her ongoing frustration in the days following.¹⁷ In the first example, social media enabled the creators to metatextually reference the logistics of the series' creation, drawing attention to the process of video production within the fictional world (and the daily lives) of its characters. The latter then afforded the creators an opportunity to establish the cause-and-effect logic of the fictional world, demonstrating the impact of the content discussed in the YouTube videos on the lives of

¹³ Senft, *Camgirls*, 25.

¹⁴ Stein, *Millennial Fandom*, 161.

¹⁵ Jessica E. Mullen, 'Lifestreaming as a Life Design Methodology' (thesis, 2010), 1, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/ETD-UT-2010-05-1323>.

¹⁶ Nothing Much To Do, *First World Coat-Hangers | Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 24 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnwjaSD6L6k>.

¹⁷ See Beatrice Duke, 'Okay Phone, IT'S STOPPED BEING FUNNY. PLEASE STOP HIDING FROM ME NOW. Grrrr', microblog, @beatricetheduke, (20 June 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/479804045175963650>; Beatrice Duke, 'Knock Knock Who's There Not My Phone, BECAUSE IT'S STILL MISSING', microblog, @beatricetheduke, (21 June 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/480288110580748288>.

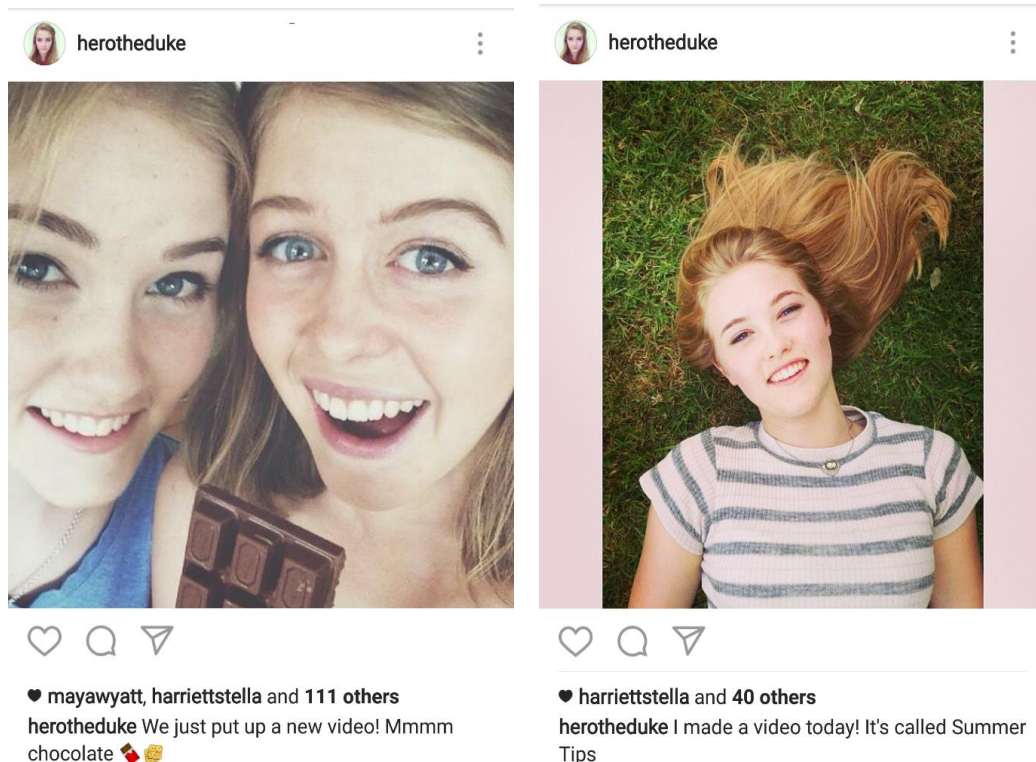


Figure 8. Hero promotes her latest videos on Instagram. Accessed 25/11/16.

the characters extraneous to them. In both instances, social media was utilized by the creators to add credibility to both the characters and the series itself, employing the ubiquitous practice of lifestreaming as a means of illustrating the characters' 'real' existence outside of the frame of their YouTube vlogs.

The same notion is (perhaps more overtly) realized by the many instances in which Hero's Instagram and Beatrice's Twitter posts are *not* directly related to the narrative depicted in their YouTube videos. Whether notifying their followers about a novel they had just finished reading, a film they had just finished watching, or even a meal Hero had just prepared and Beatrice had just eaten, the pair often updated their audience about information extraneous to the series' narrative development, typifying the notion of lifestreaming by documenting the mundane and inconsequential thoughts and activities filling their daily lives (see Figure 9). These updates were employed neither to contribute to nor elaborate upon *NMTD's* narrative; instead, they were designed to contribute to the viewers' experience of the series.

By 'experience,' I refer specifically to the capacity of these non-narrative updates to garner the relationality derived from real-world social media usage. As these updates are attributed to the characters, any affective responses the content generates are

necessarily directed towards the fictional bodies from the series, thereby engendering an increased sense of attachment between the audience and the storyworld. While the nuances of this relationality varies from platform to platform, *The New York Times Magazine* commentator Clive Thompson has proposed that the ubiquity of microblogging websites, in particular, has normalised our experience of ‘ambient awareness,’ a constant knowing about the developments in others’ lives, thoughts and movements.¹⁸ On microblogging platforms, he argues, ‘[e]ach little update – each individual bit of social information – is insignificant on its own, even supremely mundane. But taken together, over time, the little snippets coalesce into a surprisingly sophisticated portrait of your friends’ and family members’ lives, like thousands of dots making a pointillist painting.’¹⁹ The effect, he proposes, is ‘very much like being physically near someone and picking up on [their] mood through the little things [they do] – body language, sighs, stray comments – out of the corner of your eye,’²⁰ albeit with the difference that the ‘always on’ quality of social media substantially increases the time you may reasonably spend in the other’s company, as well as the number of ‘others’ you may be ‘aware’ of at any given moment. A recent study by Ana Levordashka

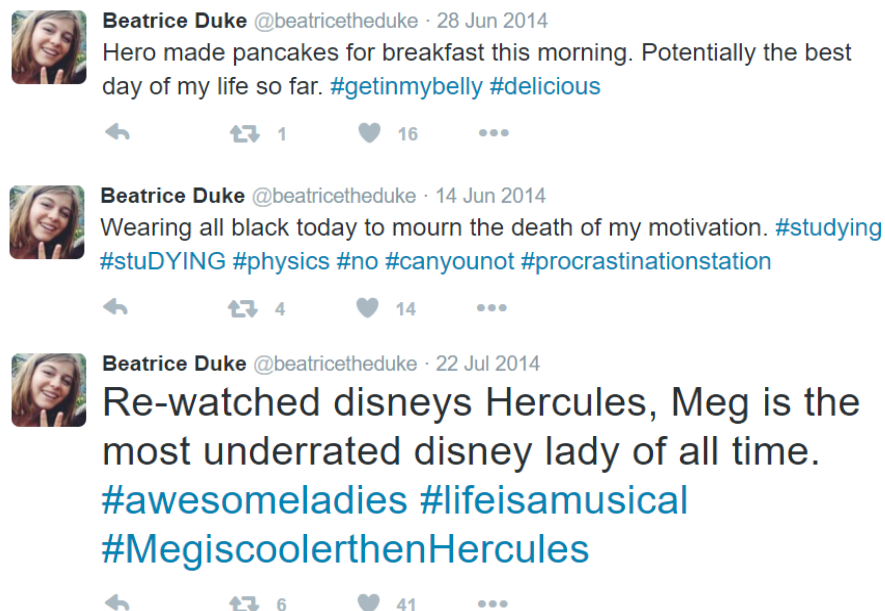


Figure 9. Beatrice posts about her daily musings and activities on Twitter, each unrelated to the series’ overarching plot. Accessed 25/11/16.

¹⁸ Clive Thompson, ‘Brave New World of Digital Intimacy’, *The New York Times*, 5 September 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07awareness-t.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

and Sonja Utz reveals that Twitter users develop ambient awareness to such an extent that they are 'able to recognize and report information about individual people' in the networks they are connected to online,²¹ including facts about others' 'personalit[ies], humor, hobbies and career[s].'²² This study also found that the experience of ambient awareness was positively correlated with increased usage of the SNS, with '[f]requent use ... suppos[ing] higher exposure to content, which allows for a sense of awareness to build up from higher fragmentation.'²³ Levordashka and Utz conclude that the experience of ambient awareness 'can serve as a basis of first impressions and result in a sense of familiarity' with others, even if the two parties are not directly communicating with each other,²⁴ a phenomenon Thompson refers to as 'ambient intimacy.'²⁵

In affording their characters the ability to publicize the micro-events of their everyday lives, *NMTD*'s social media extensions similarly encourage the development of this sense of intimacy and familiarity between its protagonists and the audience.²⁶ Fans of the series could receive updates about the movements of their favourite characters throughout the day, likely contributing to an increased feeling of 'knowing' them.²⁷ As well as offering extra characterisation, enabling fans to learn more about the characters' off-screen hobbies, likes and activities, these updates also introduced a feeling of temporal closeness, aligning the rhythms of the fan's daily life with those of the characters. This effect is especially apparent in the case of Beatrice's Twitter, given the microblogging platform's focus on up-to-the-minute updates. As Page describes, Twitter's interface is intended to heighten 'narrative immediacy ... through the use of provocations to report "what's happening" (as the update template ... prompts) rather than what *has happened*.'²⁸ The presentation of these posts in 'in reverse chronological

²¹ Ana Levordashka and Sonja Utz, 'Ambient Awareness: From Random Noise to Digital Closeness in Online Social Networks', *Computers in Human Behavior* 60 (2016): 150.

²² *Ibid.*, 153.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Thompson, 'Brave New World of Digital Intimacy'.

²⁶ Alice Marwick and danah boyd, 'To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 17, no. 2 (2011): 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 147–48.

²⁸ Page, *Stories and Social Media*, 13, original emphasis.

order' further reduces 'the reliance on past-tense reports as typical constructions of narrative time,' replacing it 'with an emphasis on events that appear to be happening in near synchronicity to the reporting and reception.'²⁹ This in turn helps to create and sustain an illusion of intimate proximity, foregrounding 'a sense of assumed relational closeness between the tweeter and their Followers' by collapsing the time and space which separates them.³⁰

This sense of 'relational closeness' is exemplified by a twitpic (Twitter picture) taken and uploaded by Beatrice during an afterschool outing with Pedro to a local park (see Figure 10).³¹ In this example, the temporal indexicality native to Twitter's interface offered a means of adding credibility to the content of the tweet. As the caption of the

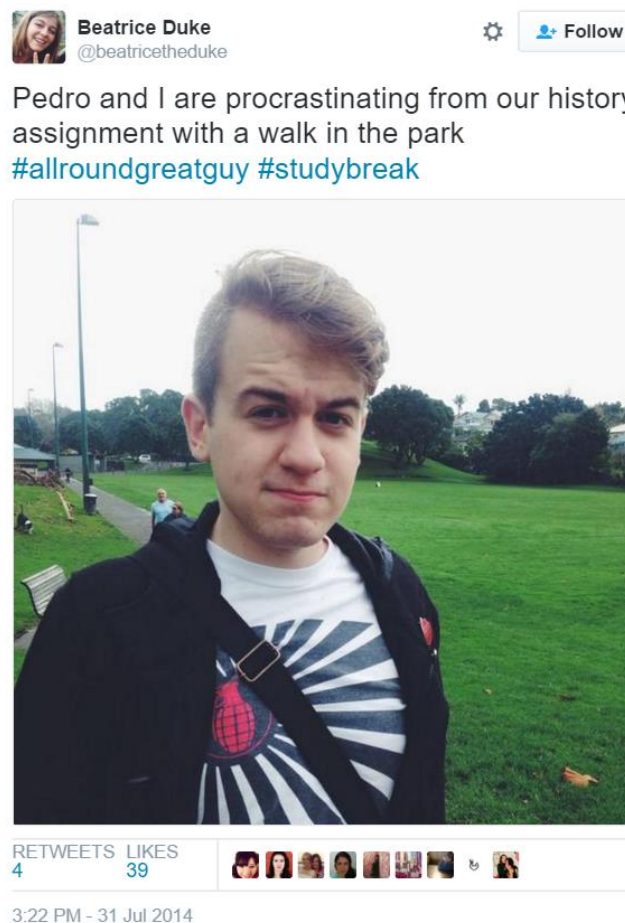


Figure 10. Beatrice and Pedro take a walk after a short-lived study session. Accessed 25/11/16.
URL: <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/494684516661735424>

²⁹ Ibid., 12.

³⁰ Ibid., 95.

³¹ Beatrice Duke, 'Pedro and I Are Procrastinating from Our History Assignment with a Walk in the Park #allroundgreatguy #studybreakpic.twitter.com/yCyVLnhg2W', microblog, @beatricetheduke, (31 July 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/494684516661735424>.

twitpic describes, Beatrice and Pedro are meant to be completing a 'history assignment,' but have decided to procrastinate by taking a walk together. This declaration is attested to by the post's timestamp, which reads 3.22pm NZST, a time consistent with the post's implication that school has finished for the day, and that the pair have already attempted an (albeit extremely short-lived) afterschool study session. What's more, the use of present-continuous verbs in the post's caption ('Pedro and I *are* procrastinating') establishes a sense of immediacy by locating the two within the series' storyworld at the moment of the tweet's publication. As local fans may also realize, the picture has been taken at a public park in the Auckland suburb of Grey Lynn, further melding *NMTD*'s storyworld and the real world by situating Beatrice and Pedro in a location which fans of the series may have themselves visited. In this instance, the temporal marker embedded in Beatrice's social media update assists not only in providing her Twitter followers with information about what she is doing, but also to locate her both temporally and spatially at the interface which conjoins her world and our own.

A similar effect is achieved by Beatrice's engagement with the #bringdowntheking hashtag in a tweet early in the series (see Figure 11).³² The hashtag references a local marketing campaign for the fourth season of HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011—), for which a giant statue of one of the show's most despised antagonists, Joffrey Baratheon, was erected in Auckland's Aotea Square. In order to dismantle the statue and symbolically rebel against Joffrey's rule, fans of the series were encouraged to tweet #bringdowntheking, with each mention of the hashtag incrementally tightening a rope poised to pull the statue to the ground. Participants were able to watch the progress either by visiting the statue on-location in Aotea Square, or by tuning into the livestream hyperlinked in Beatrice's tweet. The campaign was a success: the hashtag trended on Twitter for five days, attracting international attention, and the livestream was 'the largest ... in Australasian history.'³³ As well as characterising Beatrice as a *Game of Thrones* fan³⁴—and, moreover, drawing on the fictionality of the

³² Beatrice Duke, 'Auckland Just Became 100% Cooler. Game of Thrones Is Life. #bringdowntheking [Http://Bringdowntheking.com/Live JOFF WITH HIS HEAD. #comedygold](http://Bringdowntheking.com/Live%20JOFF%20WITH%20HIS%20HEAD.%20#comedygold)', microblog, (3 April 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/451642429024632832>.

³³ 'Game Of Thrones: #Bringdowntheking | Ads of the World™', accessed 4 November 2016, https://adsoftheworld.com/media/online/game_of_thrones_bringdowntheking.

³⁴ Louisa Stein has recently observed that characterising the female protagonists of literary adaptation web series has become a common convention of the genre, serving both to heighten the relatability of the characters for the fan communities these series are designed to attract, and to give the

HBO show as a means of heightening her real-ness in comparison—Beatrice’s engagement with this hashtag served to situate her within a particular spatiality, implicating her as a participant in this localized, real-world event.

As these examples make explicit, the creators of *NMTD* deliberately mapped out the daily lives of their characters, publicizing their thoughts and movements in real-time via social media.³⁵ Minnie Grace, one of the series’ creators, recounts that ‘time [was] *incredibly* important’ to the series.³⁶ The content on the characters’ social media profiles was posted to temporally align with the rhythms of their daily routines and personalities, even on YouTube, where the Candle Wasters ‘uploaded some videos at, like, three a.m., because it’s what the characters would do.’³⁷ While this emphasis on temporality likely had the greatest impact on local audiences sharing the characters’ timezone, time nonetheless featured as a crucial element of the creators’ ability to *enact* the narrative of *NMTD*, heightening the series’ claims to realism by continually locating its characters both temporally and spatially within the storyworld, and encouraging fans to ground their experience of the series in their own lived realities.



Figure 11. Beatrice participates in a local *Game of Thrones* marketing campaign. Accessed 2/11/16. URL: <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/451642429024632832>

series credibility amidst the current online zeitgeist. For more information, see Stein, ‘The Digital Literary Fangirl Network’.

³⁵ For a related discussion of the temporal affinities of *LBD*’s social media use, see Allegra Tepper, ‘Lizzie in Real Life: Social and Narrative Immersion Through Transmedia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’, *Spectator - The University of Southern California Journal of Film and Television* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 52–62.

³⁶ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, ‘How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries’.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Throughout the series, social media updates afforded a means by which *NMTD*'s creators were able to add depth to the characterisations of their main protagonists, elaborating on experiences and thoughts which were or could not be referenced in their YouTube videos. In addition, by evoking the sense of immediacy and 'mutual co-presence'³⁸ afforded by the livestreaming ethos of Twitter and Instagram,³⁹ the series evoked the same sense of 'ambient intimacy' that fragmented, phatic social media updates regularly inspire between real-world users.⁴⁰ In both instances, the creators' use of social media was designed to encourage a heightened sense of attachment between the characters and the audience, inseparable from their efforts to portray the protagonists as though they were 'real people.'

Characterising the Characters of NMTD as 'Micro-Celebrities'

In 2008, Theresa Senft coined the term 'micro-celebrity' to describe the altered conditions of fame enacted and experienced by camgirls, defining it as 'a new style of online performance that involves people "amping up" their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites.'⁴¹ More recently, scholars such as Alice Marwick have expounded upon Senft's original definition, suggesting that we conceptualise micro-celebrity as 'a mind-set and a collection of self-presentation practices endemic in social media, in which users strategically formulate a profile, reach out to followers, and reveal personal information to increase attention and thus improve their online status.'⁴² On social media, these scholars argue, everyday users may come to 'inhabit the celebrity subject position through the[ir] use' of the same technologies popular 'with superstar musicians, athletes, and actors.'⁴³ As

³⁸ Lomborg, *Social Media, Social Genres*, 117.

³⁹ It is worth briefly mentioning that Instagram is not designed to inspire the same sense of immediacy as Twitter. As has become standard in the Instagram community, the use of filters and editing tools in the pursuit of creating the perfect post necessarily introduces a delay between the moment the picture was taken and the time it is eventually published. However, the platform is often still used to give a glimpse into the user's current, if not recent, experiences. As Marwick points out, '[t]he presumption is that users will post photos as they happen [is] indicated by the [popularity of the] hashtag #latergram, which implies that the photo was taken earlier than it was posted.' See Alice E. Marwick, 'Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy', *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 (2015): 142.

⁴⁰ Bronwen Thomas, 'Characters in Search of a Story: Twitterfiction as an Emerging Narrative Form', in *Analyzing Digital Fiction*, ed. Alice Bell, Astrid Ensslin, and Hans Kristian Rustad (New York: Routledge, 2014), 94–108.

⁴¹ Senft, *Camgirls*, 25.

⁴² Marwick, 'Instafame', 138.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 139–40.

Marwick observes, not only does social media facilitate the documentation and sharing of ‘constant details of [one’s] day-to-day’ life, but ‘the highly visible metrics of social media success—the number of followers of “likes” attached to a piece of content—[also] encourage people to actively foster an audience.’⁴⁴

In *NMTD*, it was not uncommon for the characters’ social media activity to enact micro-celebrity and ‘self-branding’⁴⁵ strategies, illustrated by Beatrice’s self-promotion on Twitter, Hero’s characterisation as a fashion blogger on Instagram, and Ursula’s content creation on Tumblr. Of the three accounts, it is Beatrice’s Twitter which most overtly signals its use for micro-celebrity purposes, exemplifying Alice Marwick and danah boyd’s definition of micro-celebrity as ‘a mindset and a set of practices in which the audience is viewed as a fan base; popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management; and self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others.’⁴⁶ At the time of writing, Beatrice’s Twitter account features over 200 tweets and boasts 1,300 followers. Unusually, however, her account is not configured to ‘follow’ any other users. While, as Marwick explains, Twitter’s ‘directed friendship model’ has no ‘technical requirement of reciprocity, and often, no social expectation of such,’⁴⁷ Beatrice’s decision not to follow any other users nonetheless limits the scope of her activity on the site, restricting her actions to authoring original tweets and directly receiving others’ responses to them. This relatively unidirectional use of the platform differs, for instance, from the Twitter account created for Lizzie in *LBD*, which follows fourteen others, a mixture of accounts of other characters from the series and the real profiles of popular YouTubers. Although this remains a relatively small number of users for a Twitter account to follow, their inclusion nonetheless serves to more closely align Lizzie’s profile with those of real users, facilitating her interaction with friends and family while also incorporating her interests into her feed. By contrast, Beatrice’s Twitter is more overtly characterised as a means by which she is able to attract and address her *viewers*.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁵ See Alison Hearn, “‘Meat, Mask, Burden’: Probing the Contours of the Branded “Self””, *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008): 197–217.

⁴⁶ Marwick and boyd, ‘To See and Be Seen’, 140.

⁴⁷ Alice E. Marwick, ‘You May Know Me from YouTube: (Micro-)Celebrity in Social Media’, in *A Companion to Celebrity*, ed. P. David Marshall and Sean Redmond (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 116.

This is made clear even from the earliest activity on Beatrice's profile. In the second tweet posted to her account, Beatrice provides a hyperlink to "And So It Begins...", along with a small message and four hashtagged terms: #NMTD, #NothingMuchToDo, #BeatriceDuke and #Vlogging.⁴⁸ Largely forgoing the 'phatic' content typical of Twitter usage,⁴⁹ Beatrice instead utilizes the platform's hashtag function 'to make [these] term[s] searchable and therefore visible to others who are interested in tweets written about' them.⁵⁰ While her use of #vlogging has the effect of signposting the tweet for other Twitter users interested in this activity, the remainder of Beatrice's hashtags instead exemplify the mechanisms of self-branding by transforming the names of both herself and her YouTube channel into searchable terms. As Page notes, '[w]ithin the linguistic marketplace of Twitter, hashtags are a crucial currency which enables visibility and projects potential interaction with other members of the site.'⁵¹ Indeed, at the time of writing, clicking through to the search results of these hashtags returns an array of tweets by fans discussing their appreciation of the show, exemplifying how these hashtags have since been adopted as organisational tools around which fans of the series have coalesced. From the very infancy of her Twitter account, therefore, Beatrice's use of the platform foregrounds her desire to brand herself and her channel, in the process laying a foundation for her enactment of further micro-celebrity strategies.

Beatrice's Twitter activity also often echoes Marwick and boyd's assertion that '[c]elebrity is maintained through mutual recognition of power differentials by fan and practitioner.'⁵² This is especially apparent, for instance, in a tweet where Beatrice remarks upon her increasing subscriber count and takes the opportunity to thank those who watch her videos: 'Can we just acknowledge that we've got over 1000 subscribers

⁴⁸ Beatrice Duke, 'I Made a Video. Wow. A Video. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn57zw4-D0 ...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn57zw4-D0...) #NMTD #NothingMuchToDo #BeatriceDuke #Vlogging', microblog, (25 March 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/448546928872005632>.

⁴⁹ See Vincent Miller, 'New Media, Networking and Phatic Culture', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 4 (2008): 387–400; Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, 'I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience', *New Media & Society* 13, no. 1 (2011): 118.

⁵⁰ Ruth Page, 'The Linguistics of Self-Branding and Micro-Celebrity in Twitter: The Role of Hashtags', *Discourse & Communication* 6, no. 2 (2012): 184.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Marwick and boyd, 'To See and Be Seen', 140.

on YouTube now?!?' Beatrice writes, 'THANK YOU SO MUCH! (still don't know why you watch us hahaaa [sic])'⁵³ The imbalance of the message's address is clear from first glance, with Beatrice employing a single tweet to thank each of the 1,000 individuals subscribed to her YouTube channel. As Page notes, this disparity is characteristic of micro-celebrity tweets, where '[t]he audience is referred to by collective nouns ... hence constructing communication from the celebrity practitioner as one-to-many interactions, rather than dyadic conversations between named individuals.'⁵⁴ Moreover, that this tweet is explicitly addressed to the subscribers Beatrice has gained on YouTube effectively conflates the audiences she has amassed on each platform, signalling her conceptualisation of Twitter as a means of addressing those who already identify as her fans.

This conflation of Twitter followers and YouTube subscribers is pivotal to the two other micro-celebrity strategies enacted by Beatrice's Twitter account. The first, as described in the previous section, is Beatrice's use of Twitter to provide her fans with 'the illusion of "backstage"' access to her day-to-day life through the regular documentation of her thoughts and activities,⁵⁵ whereas the second is Beatrice's use of Twitter to promote her latest YouTube videos. If the former is utilized to foster an increased sense of intimacy between Beatrice and her Twitter followers, the latter aims to mobilize these affective bonds as the impetus for them to view her latest videos, transforming the sense of closeness established through her use of the platform into increased view and subscriber counts, and in turn expanding the reputation of her personal brand.

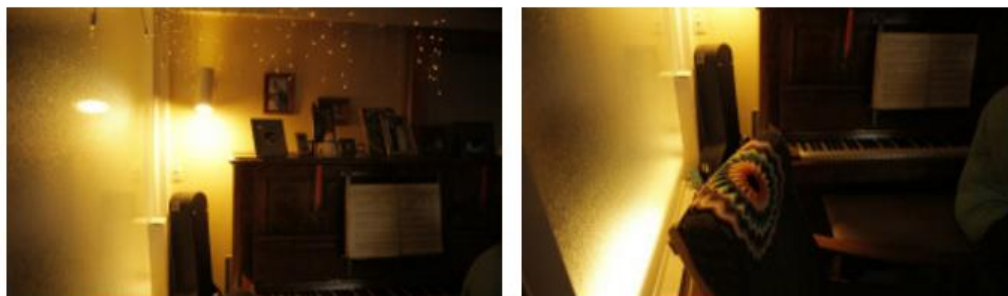
⁵³ Beatrice Duke, 'Can We Just Acknowledge That We've Got over 1000 Subscribers on YouTube Now?!? THANK YOU SO MUCH! (Still Don't Know Why You Watch Us Hahaaa)', microblog, (24 June 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke>.

⁵⁴ Page, 'The Linguistics of Self-Branding and Micro-Celebrity in Twitter', 195.

⁵⁵ Marwick and boyd, 'To See and Be Seen', 140.

In much the same vein, though by different means, Ursula employs micro-celebrity strategies on her Tumblr blog as a way of building her reputation as an aspiring photographer. Part photography portfolio, part repository for her filmmaking experiments, Ursula's blog serves as a creative outlet where she is able to upload, curate and promote the artworks she has recently created.⁵⁶ Tumblr's emphasis on visual media and the ease of content circulation marks it as the perfect platform for these efforts. Indeed, artists have long utilized the platform to showcase their works and to build substantial followings, as in the case of high school student Kate Powell, an aspiring artist whose art blog boasts more than 34,000 followers.⁵⁷ Ursula's pursuit of the same result is indicated not only by the fact that she uploads her own artwork to the site, but more specifically by the 'tags' she ascribes each picture. As on Twitter, assigning hashtags to posts on Tumblr functions to align the content with particular descriptive categories, rendering them visible in searches conducted by other users interested in the topics. For instance, the tags for one set of photos uploaded by Ursula include #house, #chair, #piano, #light, #fairy lights, #crochet, #orange, #yellow, #brown and #muted, easily earmarking her photographs for users looking for works that include these objects or aesthetics (see Figure 12).

JUNE 11, 2014



4:05PM

(Notes: 4) FILED UNDER: [house](#) [chair](#) [piano](#) [light](#) [fairy lights](#) [crochet](#) [orange](#) [yellow](#) [brown](#) [muted](#) 3 [Pedro's party](#) [watchprojects](#)

Figure 12. Ursula finds inspiration at Pedro's costume party. Accessed 27/11/16.

URL: <http://watchprojects.tumblr.com/post/88500021294>

⁵⁶ 'Watch Projects', accessed 24 February 2017, <http://watchprojects.tumblr.com/>.

⁵⁷ Amiria Robinson, 'Art Student Acquires Huge Social Media Following, Launching Career While at High School', *Student Art Guide*, 2 September 2015, <http://www.studentartguide.com/featured/kate-powell-art>.

Throughout the series, Ursula often uploads content related to significant narrative events, tagging her works accordingly. In the aforementioned example, for instance, the photograph is also tagged '#Pedro's party,' contextualising the photographs in relation to a narrative event (more comprehensively) documented in the series' YouTube videos. While this type of tagging signals the contributions of Ursula's blog specifically in its capacity as a storyworld channel, offering a different perspective on the narrative information presented in the videos, what is perhaps more intriguing about Ursula's Tumblr posts is the double audience they are designed to attract. In other words, it is not simply fans of the series to whom Ursula's photography blog is intended to appeal; rather, the content published to her blog is presented in such a way that it can plausibly exist as extraneous to the series, and be appreciated and circulated for aesthetic value on its own merits.

This is alluded to, in particular, by the use of the tag #mine on the photographs Ursula uploads to her blog very early in the series—indeed, when only two episodes of *NMTD* had been uploaded to YouTube. The use of the #mine tag is a commonplace practice on Tumblr, utilized by users across the site to establish ownership over the content they create and upload, whether photography, gifs, videos, art, fanfiction or the like. Notably, however, the #mine tag serves a relatively short-lived function once the content is introduced to the Tumblr community; though the tag is attached to the post's initial upload, visible for followers of the user who are exposed to the content on their 'dashboard' feeds, as soon as it is 'reblogged' by another user, the #mine tag is supplanted by a 'source' accreditation, where the creator's username is hyperlinked to the original post. As artist Kate Powell notes, this source link enables the creators to benefit from the content's circulation by referring users interested in the post back to the artist's blog. 'No matter how far my drawing spreads from the original post,' she writes, 'it is always linked back to my blog, which is why my follower count increases daily.'⁵⁸ Though the #mine tag is only temporarily attached to content circulated across the site, it nonetheless serves a purpose within the parameters of an artist's blog, affording them the ability to signpost the content they have personally created and uploaded to the platform. Visiting <https://watchprojects.tumblr.com/tagged/mine>, for instance, utilizes the tag's organization functionality, automatically aggregating each of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the photographs Ursula has marked with the tag to create what is effectively an online portfolio of her original works. By adopting this popular convention, the creators of *NMTD* are thus able to add credibility to Ursula's characterisation as an aspiring filmmaker and photographer—as she is repeatedly referenced throughout the series—building her reputation within these fields by crediting her with the creation of photographic content which may be circulated by Tumblr users entirely unfamiliar with the series.

The notion of accreditation is, however, necessarily problematized by the fact that Ursula is not a real photographer and is instead a fictional character. This may explain why Ursula stops using the #mine tag not long after she starts her blog, even as she continues to use descriptive tags to classify and advertise the content of her work to Tumblr's wider art community. After this point, her photographs are tagged instead with #watchprojects—recalling the branded hashtags coined on Beatrice's Twitter—as well as a numeral tag ranging from 1 to 5. Clicking on the 'Disclaimer' link in the banner for Ursula's blog illuminates the meaning of these numbers: after first revealing that 'watchprojects and its affiliated channels are part of the webseries, "Nothing Much To Do" as created by The Candle Wasters,'⁵⁹ the disclaimer explains that 'each photograph [on the blog] is tagged with a number [that] correspond[s] with an artist,'⁶⁰ whose contact details are then listed below.⁶¹ That the series' creators take such pains to ascribe the content of Ursula's blog to the real individuals who produced them only compounds the blog's focus on self-branding, illustrating the importance of properly crediting individuals for original artistic content uploaded to the site, as well as the work an artwork's circulation online can do to substantiate and build an individual's reputation as an artist.

This intersection of micro-celebrity and professional aspirations is also visible on Hero's Instagram account, where Hero's use of the platform makes explicit her desire to enter into Instagram's fashion blogger community. At the time of writing, Hero's profile features 48 posts and just over 600 followers. It contains an array of photos

⁵⁹ 'Disclaimer', *Watch Projects*, accessed 28 November 2016, <http://watchprojects.tumblr.com/disclaimer>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Three of the five 'artists' are creators of the series: Sally Bollinger, Claris Jacobs and Minnie Grace. The two others are Helen Finlayson and Sally Paine.

documenting moments from Hero's day-to-day life, as well as a number childhood photographs featuring the hashtag #TBT ('Throw Back Tuesday/Thursday'). However, it is Hero's frequent production of 'Outfit of the Day' or #OOTD photos (see Figure 13) which most forcefully realizes her use of the site for micro-celebrity purposes. As Crystal Abidin explains, '#OOTD is a genre of posts popular on social media in which users share photographs modelling the clothes they wear ... In focus is how users have ensembled an outfit from various apparel and accessories.'⁶² Stylistically speaking, #OOTD photographs can be seen to align with the 'outfit photos' uploaded by popular 'personal style bloggers,' who employ such posts 'to directly and transparently reflect [their] genuine day-to-day style.'⁶³ This point is echoed by Marwick and boyd, who note that '[f]or fashion bloggers, the ability to assemble an outfit that reflects a personal aesthetic and knowledge of larger trends marks one as authentically stylish and fashionable.'⁶⁴ Despite these photos' evocation of authenticity and transparency, however, Minh-Ha T. Pham points out that 'it is generally known that outfit photos are not the spontaneously created and published snapshots of personal style they are made to seem. Increasingly, they are highly crafted productions of the blogger's taste and image that use a fairly stable set of formal and aesthetic strategies.'⁶⁵ Among these aesthetic conventions, 'the presentation of outfit photos in personal style blogs and other social media spaces almost always begins with at least one head-to-toe shot, with the blogger centered in the photograph.'⁶⁶ This visual style is also frequently adopted in #OOTD posts, where the combination of clothes and accessories worn by the individual are the photographs' central focus.

Using the #OOTD hashtag enables Hero to become a participant in the platform's ongoing conversations about popular fashion trends and styles, connecting her posts with the countless others uploaded by Instagrammers across the site. Publicizing her contributions to these dialogues, the #OOTD hashtag allows Hero to showcase her original ideas and creativity to like-minded others, in the process building a reputation

⁶² Crystal Abidin, 'Visibility Labour: Engaging with Influencers' Fashion Brands and #OOTD Advertorial Campaigns on Instagram', *Media International Australia* 161, no. 1 (2016): 92.

⁶³ Minh-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet* (Duke University Press: Durnham & London, 2015), 106.

⁶⁴ Marwick and boyd, 'I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately', 124.

⁶⁵ Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet*, 106.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

herotheduke

♥ matthewjames1995, harriettstella and 125 others
 herotheduke Ursula took this photo of me! I guess it can count as an #ootd

herotheduke

♥ mayawiyatt and 82 others
 herotheduke Here's my #ootd 🌸🍷

herotheduke

♥ matthewjames1995, mayawiyatt and 150 others
 herotheduke Look who's here. What a sweetheart. Also this is my #ootd 💙

herotheduke

♥ matthewjames1995, mayawiyatt and 81 others
 herotheduke Here's another #ootd 🍊🍷

Figure 13. Hero posts #OOTD photos on Instagram, entering into the platform's conversations about fashion and styling trends. Accessed 29/11/16.

for her personal style and fashion sense. As in the case of Ursula's blog, Hero's Instagram activity aids the establishment of her personal brand, in this case specifically within the confines of Instagram's fashion community. In addition, given the hashtag's emphasis on one's daily fashion choices, Hero's contributions to the #OOTD hashtag serve to normalize and entwine her fashion expertise as part of her day-to-day personality, in the process enhancing the credibility of these self-branding strategies.

Throughout *NMTD*, across a number of social media sites, Beatrice, Ursula and Hero's online activity evoked micro-celebrity strategies to create reputations for the characters in the domains they aspired to be most successful. While Beatrice's Twitter was utilized as tool to create and sustain a personal brand that both encompassed and elaborated on her characterisation as an aspiring YouTuber, the social media activity of Ursula and Hero was used to detail their interests in film and photography, and fashion and styling, respectively, creating online reputations that aligned with the interests outlined for each character in the main narrative. In order to contribute to the conversations ongoing across these SNS, the characters engaged with conventions popular on each, in turn increasing their visibility among each platforms' user networks and potentially drawing new viewers to the series. On Hero's Instagram, for instance, her bio reads 'My cousin and I make videos!' followed by a link to the Nothing Much to Do YouTube channel; likewise, the header of Ursula's blog features a series of hyperlinks connecting curious browsers to the Nothing Much to Do and benaddiction YouTube channels, Hero's Instagram and Beatrice's Twitter. In this sense, the 'branded selves' created by *NMTD*'s social media presence can be viewed as a method of directing new, diverse audiences to the series, attracting viewers who share interests with the characters to the stories told about them on YouTube.

Talking Back: Interacting with the NMTD 'Flamangos'

As the majority of the series was filmed over a three-week period in January 2014, the series' social media profiles were significant in affording the creators a greater degree of flexibility in their contributions to the narrative as it unfolded, facilitating Beatrice's timely observations of her increasing subscriber count, and disclaimers about technical issues delaying the release of weekly videos.⁶⁷ In an extension of this capacity for

⁶⁷ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'.

narrative spontaneity, the series' social media profiles were also employed as channels for increased interactivity, at once offering fans the opportunity to 'talk back' to the characters and respond to new developments in the narrative, as well as affording the characters a way of reacting to this feedback; although the characters weren't able to address fans' comments and questions in the pre-filmed YouTube videos, they *were* able to address them through their social media profiles. This is illustrated in Figure 14, for instance, where Beatrice utilizes Twitter's social networking capabilities to converse with one of her fans about their shared (albeit competitive) love for actor Benedict Cumberbatch.⁶⁸ As this example makes explicit, *NMTD*'s social media activity also facilitated a switch from the second-person plural address inherent in its videos to a singular second-person address, allowing the characters to speak directly to their fans. Such activity was perhaps most notable on Beatrice's Twitter, where she repeatedly utilized the @reply function in order to talk back to the fans who responded to her tweets. While this interactivity had the effect of heightening the credibility of the characters' social media usage, depicting them using the SNS in line with the sites' communicative ethos, it also served to project fans into the world of the drama, bridging the gap between the fictional world of the characters and their real-world audiences via communication which traversed both.⁶⁹

Strategically, the creators of *NMTD* were able to channel this interactivity back into the series' primary narrative through their production of four 'Q&A' videos shot during the series' release. Aligned with the Q&A format popular among the YouTube community, these videos each involved Beatrice, Hero and Benedict directly responding to questions suggested by their viewers, solicited through requests penned in the description boxes below each of the characters' vlogs. Under "Football Antics: Part One," for example, Beatrice writes: 'We're thinking about doing a Q&A video so if you have any questions for me or Hero, comment them below! (or tweet them or through

⁶⁸ Beatrice Duke, 'Dear Benedict Cumberbatch My Name Is Beatrice Duke Will You Marry Me Okay Bye See You at the Wedding #iloveyou #youareperfection #yes', microblog, @beatricetheduke, (5 June 2014), <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/474485359863025664>.

⁶⁹ For a similar analysis of social media's traversal of reality and fictionality in *LBD*, see Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries', 102.



Beatrice Duke
@beatricetheduke



Follow

Dear Benedict Cumberbatch my name is Beatrice Duke will you marry me okay bye see you at the wedding #iloveyou #youareperfection #yes

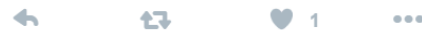
RETWEETS 2 LIKES 20



9:38 PM - 5 Jun 2014



Lindsay @explaaaain · 6 Jun 2014
[@beatricetheduke](#) He's mine, so back off. #mrscumberbatchforlife



Beatrice Duke @beatricetheduke · 9 Jun 2014
[@explaaaain](#) I WILL FIGHT YOU ON THIS #BenedictDuke



Lindsay @explaaaain · 10 Jun 2014
[@beatricetheduke](#) A fight to the death? Because his cheekbones will be mine. :P



Beatrice Duke @beatricetheduke · 10 Jun 2014
[@explaaaain](#) oh hey whoops it looks like he already said yes to me #BEATYOUTOTHEALTER



Figure 14. Beatrice interacts with a Twitter follower. Accessed 17/4/16.
URL: <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke/status/474485359863025664>

instagram [sic] or via owl or you know, whatever, get in contact with us),⁷⁰ followed by links to Beatrice's Twitter, Hero's Instagram and Ursula's Tumblr. Compounding the characterisation of these profiles as sites for fan interaction, users were encouraged to engage with them specifically as a way of contributing to the series' narrative. Collating the replies they received by way of YouTube comments, Tumblr 'asks' and Twitter @replies, *NMTD*'s creators then posed them to their characters, uploading four Q&A videos over the course of the series: "Q&A FOR THE BENADDICKTS" (episode 17) and "Q&A" (episode 18) were posted early in the series, while "Q&A 2: The Second One" (episode 40) and "BENADDIQ&ATION" (episode 42) were published in the lead-up to the series' climax.

Like Q&A videos more generally, these videos celebrated the interactive dynamics of YouTube as a social network site, foregrounding the ability for YouTubers to 'talk back' to their viewers by answering questions they received not only via YouTube itself, but through the nexus of social media profiles created for the series. These questions varied in frivolity, ranging from the characters' Hogwarts houses and dream superpowers, to their first impressions of other characters, embarrassing anecdotes, future plans and inspirational figures in their lives. As is typical of this video's format, the characters adopted the template '(name) on (social media platform) asks...' mentioning the usernames of the author before reading out and answering each question their fans had submitted.⁷¹ Much as Marwick and boyd note of @replies to fans by celebrities on Twitter, these mentions 'function[ed] as a mark of status'⁷² for avid fans by publicizing (and hence legitimizing) their relationship with the series. I would suggest, however, that it is the sense of *involvement* fostered by this submission process which rendered the Q&A videos most valuable. Not only were fans able to *speak to* the characters via social media; they themselves could *become* characters in the fiction, literally spoken into being within the storyworld through the characters' verbal acknowledgement of their existence. Encapsulating the interactive possibilities of the series' social media profiles, in other words, *NMTD*'s Q&A videos directly incorporated

⁷⁰ Nothing Much To Do, *Football Antics*.

⁷¹ It is worth noting that this template is entirely overlooked for a number of the questions answered by the characters, or else supplanted with 'Anonymous on Tumblr asks...' raising questions about the legitimacy of some of the submissions.

⁷² Marwick and boyd, 'To See and Be Seen', 145.

fans and their contributions into the narrative storyworld, allowing them to talk and be talked to within the world of the series.

Cultivating NMTD's Fan Community

While social media was utilized throughout *NMTD* as a means of elaborating upon and enhancing the reality of the series' narrative, these social media sites were themselves often active locations for the fan communities inspired by the series. As aforementioned, for example, the #NMTD hashtag coined in one of Beatrice's early Twitter posts is at the time of writing inundated with tweets by fans voicing their love of the series, as well as new viewers' reactions to the narrative as they live-tweet watching the series for the first time. Such fandom prompts were frequently embedded in the creators' social media activity throughout the series, attesting to the Candle Wasters' strategic recognition of social media as a location where viewers were both able to experience the fictional narrative and participate in fandom practices surrounding it.

Consider, for instance, the Tumblr blog created as part of Pedro's campaign to become 'student leader' at Messina High.⁷³ We are first alerted to the existence of this blog in the description box for "A Special Announcement!",⁷⁴ the video in which Pedro announces his candidacy for the position. In the description, Beatrice provides a hyperlink to the campaign blog and encourages her viewers to '[r]eblog his face on tumblr [sic] to show your support.'⁷⁵ The site features just one image (see Figure 15), which visitors are able to endorse either by 'liking' or 'reblogging' to their own Tumblr pages. While liking has little effect on the circulation of the photo, users who choose to reblog the image re-distribute the campaign graphic and slogan to their own personal network of Tumblr followers. At the time of writing, the image has 153 'notes' in total, of which approximately 100 are likes and 50 are reblogs. Though Beatrice acknowledges that her viewers—the majority of whom are not students at Messina High—will be unable to vote in the school elections (their fictionality notwithstanding), she nonetheless recognises the resource her audience presents as a means of generating

⁷³ 'Vote For Pedro!', accessed 2 May 2016, <http://all-round-great-guy.tumblr.com/>.

⁷⁴ Nothing Much To Do, *A Special Announcement!* | *Nothing Much To Do*, accessed 10 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6xNPNXgALg>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

online 'buzz' about her friend's campaign—a point attested to by the number of fans of the series who indeed chose to publish the image on their personal blogs.

On the one hand, Pedro's campaign Tumblr can be seen to function as a storyworld channel, operating within the logic of the series' diegesis and providing an ancillary platform through which audiences may engage with the events occurring within it. Indeed, the viral imperative surrounding the circulation of graphic likely served to heighten the sense of involvement felt by fans of the series, with their likes and reblogs diegetically framed as a means of directly contributing to the narrative and (the eventual success of) Pedro's campaign. Alternatively, however, the blog can also be viewed as a gentle encouragement by the creators for viewers to participate in the series' fan community, providing a template which may be easily adopted and circulated by those desiring to publicize their engagement with *NMTD*. In this example, the graphic's ambiguity renders its recirculation not only an opportunity for fans to flaunt their affiliation with the series, but also to heighten the sense of community amongst those who successfully understand the reference.

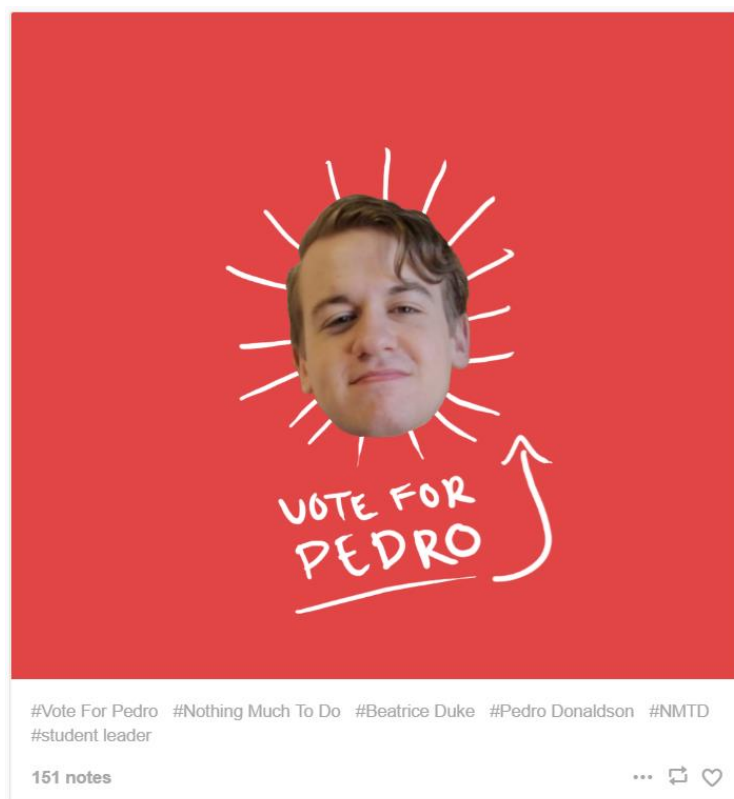


Figure 15. 'Reblog his face to show your support!' Pedro's campaign graphic. Accessed 10/6/15.
URL: <http://all-round-great-guy.tumblr.com/>

Similarly attesting to social media's complicated characterisation as a site for *NMTD*'s narrative and fandom is the official Tumblr of the series' creators, the Candle Wasters.⁷⁶ While the blog makes no claims to exist within the *NMTD* storyworld, it nonetheless inhabits the same digital space, situated somewhere betwixt the series' social media extensions and the fan communities which operate around it. Accordingly, the blog functions as a mediator of sorts between these two worlds, alternating between promoting the social media content published to the characters' accounts and enthusiastically encouraging the production of fan works for the series, in both cases by reblogging examples of each for redistribution among the blog's own network of followers. As creator Elsie Bollinger describes it,

Tumblr was a really important platform for us, 'cause that's where people who were interested in literary vlog series reside. It's also a platform that we understand ourselves, because we use Tumblr a lot, and it's really neat that ... we [can] go on there to see kind of communities who, um, enjoy different TV shows and things... [and] we also have a community there who enjoy our web series. And that's where we can see ... them create, um, different stuff inspired by *our* series.⁷⁷

This fan inspiration is illustrated by the hundreds of pages of archived fan works which have been reblogged by the Candle Wasters, containing an array of GIF sets, photosets, fan art (tagged by the Candle Wasters as '#this is wow'), fan vids and musical playlists inspired by the characters. The creators often also engaged with fans who wrote to them via Tumblr's 'Ask' function, answering their questions about the series' production and distribution, and providing behind-the-scenes content such as original scripts and photos from the set.⁷⁸ While, as Seymour, Roth and Flegel note, the producers of *LBD* were 'often critiqued for overstepping their boundaries' when they attempted to enter fan spaces,⁷⁹ the Candle Wasters' blog steered away from outright discussions of narrative and character developments—and hence the tension these conversations have in the past inspired— instead foregrounding their appreciation of the enthusiasm and creative output of their fan-base. By engaging with and endorsing the activities of their fans, the Candle Wasters were able to utilize their own social media presence as a

⁷⁶ 'The Candle Wasters', accessed 22 February 2017, <http://thecandlewasters.tumblr.com/>.

⁷⁷ Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'.

⁷⁸ Fans can, for instance, access the original script for the popular episode "PROJECT II" at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NMkl4cvrtUVeWraTQJKk5RuQYLgJq49KMVApG7hTPRC/>

⁷⁹ Seymour, Roth, and Flegel, 'The Lizzie Bennet Diaries', 105.

means of creating a safe and encouraging environment for the series' fan community. Their success in this regard is attested to not simply by the outpouring of fan works archived across Tumblr, but also by the number of fan-made videos submitted for inclusion in an emotional montage dedicated to Hero,⁸⁰ and the fans who have since attended real-world meet-ups with the actor and creators.⁸¹

NMTD's Narrative Experience

Due to the relatively recent emergence of fictional works located on social media, there has not yet been any research into the implications of viewers encountering fictional texts in the same digital spaces they regularly use to interact with their own (real) social networks. As Allegra Tepper writes of *LBD*, for instance, '[i]f a fan is using Twitter to catch up with friends, colleagues and breaking news when they see an exchange between @ggdarcy and @FitzOnTheFitz, it blurs the line between their everyday reality and the *LBD* narrative.'⁸² This is undoubtedly a topic worthy of future empirical research, particularly given the ever-expanding canon and proven popularity of fictions set on social media platforms. For the moment, however, we might begin to theorize the effects of conflating fictional and real-world social networks specifically in relation to distributed adaptations, which each extend their blurring of fact and fiction across multiple social media platforms.

Within the field of digital narratology, the ubiquity and rapidly expanding capabilities of mobile computing technologies has necessitated a heightened focus on the design and reception of contemporary digital fictions. As Gerard Goggin and Caroline Hamilton recount, the rise of mobile internet and wifi saw individuals 'avail[ing] themselves of highly portable devices that offer[ed] ever-present connections to online networks,'⁸³ which were quickly embraced for their literary functionality,

⁸⁰ 'Message For Hero | The Candle Wasters - YouTube', accessed 2 December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8RbaOSTobU>.

⁸¹ Two meet-ups organised subsequent to *NMTD*'s conclusion have been documented by the Candle Wasters on their official YouTube channel. See The Candle Wasters, *NMTD Auckland Meetup! | The Candle Wasters*, accessed 2 December 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoUI6bm8ats>; The Candle Wasters, *NMTD Wellington Meetup! | The Candle Wasters*, accessed 2 December 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CMO_mPGIBQ.

⁸² Tepper, 'Lizzie in Real Life'.

⁸³ Gerard Goggin and Caroline Hamilton, 'Narrative Fiction and Mobile Media after the Text-Message Novel', in *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies*, ed. Jason Farman (New York: Routledge, 2014), 229.

affording users new methods of ‘reading novels, short stories, comics, and other fiction formats.’⁸⁴ What resulted was an ‘increased flexibility over the times and places that become sites of engagement’ for fictional texts,⁸⁵ typified by mobile narrative forms such as Japan’s *keitai shōsetsu* (cell-phone novels) which are regularly ‘read, written and commented on by thousands on their daily train rides to and from work.’⁸⁶ For Larissa Hjorth, the immense popularity of *keitai shōsetsu* signals ‘the impact of mobile media on the way in which storytelling and public reading is narrated and negotiated through and by public spaces.’⁸⁷ As she further explains, ‘*keitai shōsetsu* are interactive, discursive, personal and immediate micro-narratives proffering readers quick, casual immersions of story-telling that cater to the multitasking and interpretability of contemporary work and life patterns.’⁸⁸

There is, I believe, a parallel to be drawn between the ‘quick, casual’ and flexible style of mobile reception encouraged by *keitai shōsetsu* and that offered to readers of social media fictions. Using smartphone apps and the like, audiences of social media fictions are invited to keep abreast of the updates to fictional content as they go about their daily lives, intertwining their experience of the fiction with their day-to-day routines in much the same way as real-world ‘[s]ocial media interactions are interwoven increasingly with [one’s] daily experience.’⁸⁹ Whether audiences opt in to receiving push notifications alerting them to recent updates or stumble across new content as they absently scroll through updates authored by their friends and family, the social media framework of these fictions affords an ongoing, unfolding integration of narrative and reality which has the potential to blur the spatiotemporal boundaries between the two.

In the case of distributed adaptations, this fragmentary mode of engagement is further complicated by the multiplicity of social media sources recruited to convey the fiction. As Carlos Alberto Scolari observes, when audiences engage with many narrative

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Page, *Stories and Social Media*, 8.

⁸⁶ L. Hjorth, ‘Stories of the Mobile: Women, Micronarratives, and Mobile Novels in Japan’, in *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies*, ed. Jason Farman (New York: Routledge, 2014), 239.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 243.

⁸⁹ Page, *Stories and Social Media*, 7.

sources and elements, they are forced to ‘process representations from different media and languages and reconstruct more extensive areas of the fictional world.’⁹⁰ In contrast to what Scolari calls ‘single media consumers,’ who enjoy just one of the narrative sources available to them, multi-platform audiences of distributed adaptations are tasked with demonstrating a variety of locative, interpretive and (re-)constructive behaviours, searching, decoding and piecing together the narrative fragments in order to appreciate the story as a whole.

This practice of ‘assemblage’⁹¹ can be seen to have its roots in hypertext fiction, an earlier form of digital narrative for which an emphasis on narrative dispersal similarly disrupted traditional models of reception. Hypertext fiction gained traction as a literary form alongside the growing accessibility of the World Wide Web during the 1990s, and involves, as Janet Murray describes, ‘a set of documents of any kind (images, text, charts, tables, video clips) connected to one another by links.’⁹² Following the 1987 publication of Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story*,⁹³ a new style of digital storytelling emerged, offering ‘writers a new means of experimenting with segmentation, juxtaposition, and connectedness.’⁹⁴ Hypertext fictions generally involve a web of ‘lexias (or reading units)’⁹⁵ containing fragmented narrative prompts relating to a given (and often abstract) story. The lexias ‘occupy a virtual space in which they can be preceded by, followed by, and placed next to an infinite number of other lexias,’⁹⁶ and are navigated according to the reader’s discretion. As a result, hypertext fictions afford each reader the ability to generate (and receive) a unique experience of the same text: as Murray describes it, the ‘indeterminate structure’ of hypertext fictions foregrounds ‘the act of navigation to unfold a story that flows from our own meaningful choices.’⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Scolari, ‘Transmedia Storytelling’, 597.

⁹¹ See Dena, ‘Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling’.

⁹² Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 55.

⁹³ James Pope, ‘Where Do We Go From Here? Readers’ Responses to Interactive Fiction Narrative Structures, Reading Pleasure and the Impact of Interface Design’, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16, no. 1 (2010): 447.

⁹⁴ Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 56.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133; see also George P. Landow, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 6.

The same could be argued of distributed adaptations, which similarly feature collections of narrative fragments that are connected—to varying degrees of directness—by hyperlinks, necessarily navigated and pieced together by their audience to create and construct the story’s narrative. However, though hypertext was enthusiastically celebrated in its infancy for the innovation of its narrative structure, it has failed to ever attract a substantial community of readers.⁹⁸ This has largely been attributed to the difficulty individuals encounter when attempting to read hypertext fictions, a complication James Pope suggests arises from the fact that this ‘reading’ experience is so unlike that of any other literary medium. For Pope, hypertext readers are thwarted in their attempts to draw upon past reading experiences with books, video games, and websites as a means of making sense of hypertext works:

... nothing in the current array of narrative or interactivity conventions properly fits hypertext, precisely because interactive fiction is by definition combining form, content and operation across all media. Hypertext fiction is unique in this way and therefore uniquely able to baffle its readers; it has not yet developed its own conventions to help readers through the mass of links and narrative multi-structures.⁹⁹

The success of distributed adaptations such as *LBD* and *NMTD* would suggest, however, that this difficulty may be reconciled by the use of social media platforms as the narrative infrastructure for multi-platform texts. Though audiences are still required to hunt for, interpret and connect the fragments of *NMTD*’s narrative—dispersed as they are across numerous social media platforms—the activity here is modelled after more familiar behaviours: in the current age of internet ubiquity, web users are highly adept at hunting and gathering for information online,¹⁰⁰ particularly in the case of personal narratives authored by everyday users on social media.¹⁰¹ As Page notes, stories on social media ‘can be told in their entirety within an individual unit of social media, such as a forum post, blog entry, or status update, but they can also be distributed across multiple units, as episodes that unfold between sequenced posts, or posts and

⁹⁸ James Pope, ‘A Future for Hypertext Fiction’, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 448; Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 133.

⁹⁹ Pope, ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’, 81.

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Suzanne Scott, ‘Textual Poachers, Twenty Years Later: A Conversation Between Henry Jenkins and Suzanne Scott’, in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Updated 20th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), xxiv.

comments.’¹⁰² In the case of the latter, elements of social media interfaces such as ‘timelines’ and ‘timestamps’ provide temporal cues which can assist the necessary (re)construction of the linear narratives which appear as fragments.¹⁰³ That this process has been all but assimilated into the unconscious, everyday practice of social media users would suggest that the success of distributed adaptations set on these same platforms derives from their ability to transpose these skills into the realm of fiction, offering similarly complex narrative structures which their audiences come already equipped to navigate, process and enjoy.

¹⁰² Page, *Stories and Social Media*, 12.

¹⁰³ Page, ‘The Linguistics of Self-Branding and Micro-Celebrity in Twitter’, 34.

Conclusion

By all accounts, *Nothing Much to Do* was incredibly well-received. At the time of writing, the series' three YouTube channels together boast almost 3,000,000 video views, with Beatrice and Hero's channel also retaining over 11,000 subscribers. Beyond these figures, the series' impact is perhaps best illustrated by the response to the Kickstarter campaigns organized by the Candle Wasters since late 2014. During the final two weeks of *NMTD*, the creators revealed their intention to write a sequel to the series, creating a Kickstarter where interested fans could donate towards its production costs.¹ Quickly and enthusiastically mobilizing fan support, the project's original funding goal of \$4,000 was met just two hours after the campaign went live, amassing over \$22,000 in fan donations by the end of the month.² The resulting project, entitled *Lovely Little Losers* (2015, henceforth *LLL*), was also a literary adaptation web series, but was more loosely inspired by its canonical source material, inserting the main characters from *NMTD* into a narrative based on Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1597).³

Following *LLL*, the Candle Wasters have seen continued success, pursuing an array of increasingly ambitious projects. Joined by a fifth member, Robbie Nicol, the Candle Wasters released a third Shakespeare-inspired project in mid-2016, this time a more conventionally aligned web series entitled *Bright Summer Night*, based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595).⁴ Highlighting the Candle Wasters' growing reputation in the local production industry, *Bright Summer Night* received a \$100,000 grant from national funding body NZ On Air, while also attracting \$25,000 from a second crowd-funding initiative.⁵ At the time of writing, the Candle Wasters are developing two new projects, *Happy Playland* and *The Tragicomic*, both of which have received funding from NZ On Air and are due for release in late 2017. In addition, fulfilling a campaign promise from their *NMTD* Kickstarter, the cohort also recently

¹ 'Lovely Little Losers', *Kickstarter*, accessed 10 June 2016, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/274696546/lovely-little-losers>.

² Bollinger, Jacobs, and Grace, 'How to Make Kick-Ass Literary Webseries'.

³ The full playlist of *LLL* videos may be accessed at 'Lovely Little Losers - YouTube', accessed 17 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgyveADib3M6R7HvIHGA91QnBQLLv1Q1P>.

⁴ *Bright Summer Nights* may be viewed at 'Bright Summer Night Story - YouTube', accessed 17 February 2017, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZ4M4eic7acRxRp2L-0Lrcvd_c1PpP1Fp.

⁵ 'Bright Summer Night', *Kickstarter*, accessed 22 February 2017, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/274696546/bright-summer-night>.

produced a short film based on a 'missing' scene from *NMTD*, revealing how Benedick was deceived into believing that Beatrice was in love with him. The film, entitled *Tricking Ben*, was released in late February 2017.⁶ While the continued outpouring of fan support for the Candle Wasters' creative endeavours attests to the enthusiastic audience demand for media that is intelligent, feminist and inclusive,⁷ it is also testament to the group's continued success in inspiring a strong sense of audience attachment towards their projects.

Echoing the innovative style of storytelling introduced and popularised by *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *NMTD* sits firmly within the canon of what I call *distributed adaptations*: texts which orchestrate an adaptation of a well-known story to play out across a number of narrative channels. While such texts are often described as examples of 'transmedia storytelling,' they do not employ multiple mediums in order to expand a complex fictional universe, as denoted by Henry Jenkins' original conceptualisation of the term;⁸ rather, distributed adaptations recruit an array of narrative sources to convey and enrich the audience's experience of a single story. *NMTD*, for instance, spreads its modernization of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* across a number of social media platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr. Aligning both with Jason Mittell's notion of 'unbalanced transmedia' and the multi-channel storytelling model proposed by Christy Dena,⁹ *NMTD* recruits these platforms to varying degrees of narrative centrality, instigating a hierarchical arrangement of narrative elements distributed across multiple platforms. While the vlog episodes hosted by the series' three YouTube accounts together comprise the series' main story channel, offering the most substantial and cohesive contributions to the narrative, the character profiles curated across Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr are each designed to enhance the audience's appreciation of the storyworld through their provision of supplementary narrative information.

⁶ The Candle Wasters, *Tricking Ben | The Candle Wasters*, accessed 22 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwWKFgg6pGo>.

⁷ Online Heroines, *Candle Wasters - Nothing Much To Do // Online Heroines*, accessed 23 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Gkr3dBGFoo>.

⁸ See Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*; Jenkins, 'Seven Myths About Transmedia Storytelling Debunked'; Jenkins, 'Transmedia 202: Further Reflections'.

⁹ See, respectively, Mittell, *Complex TV*, 294; Dena, 'Towards a Poetics of Multi-Channel Storytelling'.

Throughout the series, the creators of *NMTD* embraced the affordances of these four social media platforms, diversifying their narrative contributions in accordance with the functionalities unique to each. In addition, to a greater extent than most other examples from the genre, the *Candle Wasters* also proactively engaged with the conventions and aesthetics most popular on each site, modelling their fictional content after the behaviours and styles consolidated by real-world users. In so doing, the creators succeeded in ascribing real-world social media competencies to their characters, portraying them as fluent and active members of these online communities. Consequently, the series foregrounded a blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality throughout, evoking the relational dynamics invested in these real-world practices and directing them towards the fictional bodies of the characters.

Within academe, it is common practice to assume that media forms predicated on mimicry of the real are primarily (and maliciously) interested in deceiving audiences into believing that they are watching expressions of reality rather than mediated content. Such debates have long characterised the study of reality television, for instance, where misplaced expectations for ‘realist representation[s]’ have, upon their contradiction, often provoked critics to denounce the value of this programming altogether.¹⁰ However, just as recent scholarship has attested that the value of reality television rests beyond the binarisation of reality and artifice,¹¹ so too is there value to be found in other media forms which purposefully conflate fiction and reality.

Among the developing canon of web-based fictions, experimentation with ‘the border between the representational world and the actual world’ has advanced at a rapid pace.¹² While early vlog fictions such as *EmoKid21Ohio* and *LonelyGirl15* indeed intended to camouflage their adolescent protagonists as members of YouTube’s communities of belonging, their exposure assisted in normalising what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green term ‘inauthentic authenticity,’ which has in turn been adopted as

¹⁰ Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 3; See also Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*, 21–25.

¹¹ While this area of scholarship is too extensive to detail here, see for example Biressi and Nunn, *Reality TV*; Annette Hill, *Reality TV* (London & New York: Routledge, 2015); Kavka, *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy*; Misha Kavka, *Reality TV, TV Genres* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Helen Wood and Beverley Skeggs, eds., *Reality Television and Class* (London & New York: British Film Institute, 2011).

¹² Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 103.

part of YouTube's 'cultural repertoire.'¹³ Thematically speaking, this concept can be seen to have informed the remaining three seasons of *LonelyGirl15*, for example, as well as the same creators' later production of *KateModern* on Bebo. In both instances, despite their widely-known fabrication, these web series continued to replicate commonplace online behaviours and aesthetics, in the process teaching their viewers how to recognise fictionality (even) when it 'feels real.' Such efforts are further magnified in the case of literary adaptation web series, which by adopting well-known, often canonical narratives as the basis for their distributed (social media) fictions are from the outset highly likely to attract 'knowing' audiences—both in the sense of 'knowing' the series is a work of fiction, and of 'knowing' (that is, already being familiar with) the source material which guides its modernisation.

What the success of web series such as *NMTD* make explicit, therefore, is the pleasure to be derived from texts which are both overtly fictional and carefully designed to mimic reality. In contrast to earlier experimentations with storytelling on social media, the blurring of fiction and reality achieved throughout *NMTD* is not intended to mislead audiences into mistaking the series for actuality. Rather, *NMTD* celebrates what we might call *the pleasure of the 'as though,'* extending an invitation to the audience to experience and engage with its fictional characters and content *as though* both were real. Subverting those debates aforementioned, which have a tendency to demonise media forms that 'deceptively' evoke realness, the success of *NMTD* highlights the capacity for contemporary media audiences to reconcile their suspension of disbelief in fictional texts with evocations of real-world relationality, thereby illustrating the thrill to be had from experiencing (real) affective responses towards people whom the viewers know to be fictional characters.

Similar efforts to evoke this re(a)lationality are increasingly prevalent among distributed narratives which adopt digital platforms for their storytelling efforts. *SKAM* (2015—), for instance, a young adult drama produced by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation NRK, has recently attested to the ability for mainstream shows to successfully incorporate social media storyworld channels into their narrative

¹³ Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, 28.

expression.¹⁴ Echoing the analysis of *NMTD*'s social media extensions in Chapter Four, *SKAM* continually updates an array of character postings to evoke a sense of *distributed liveness*, utilizing the instantaneity afforded by social media to parallel the events occurring in the fictional diegesis with the day-to-day lives of its audience. Though *SKAM*'s episodes are distributed in full every Friday, their content first appears in fragmentary clips which are posted to the show's official website throughout the week. The show also employs fourteen profiles on Instagram, as well as screenshots of iMessage conversations between the characters, which are similarly updated to align with the characters' movements in the storyworld. For the show's live viewers, the 'real time' distribution of these narrative fragments has the effect of collapsing the boundary between the worlds of fiction and reality, establishing a sense of temporal intimacy which at once encourages and enhances the audience's ability to relate to the fiction *as though* it were real.

While *SKAM* employs these efforts within an established television industry, there is a danger that amateur experimentations with social media's fictional potential will prove unsustainable in the long-term. As outlined above, for instance, the Candle Wasters' more recent projects have increasingly aligned with more traditional conceptualisations of digital storytelling, featuring serial narratives with episodes 6-10 minutes in length, which largely forgo the social media extensions featured in *NMTD*. Even *LLL*, which directly succeeded *NMTD*, attempted a more streamlined narrative structure, giving multiple characters access to the same YouTube channel, so as to concentrate the majority of the series' vlog episodes in the same digital location. Though the creators did create an additional YouTube channel for one of *LLL*'s secondary characters,¹⁵ they did not utilize any other social media platforms to express the series' narrative.

This change of the Candle Wasters' creative direction testifies to the instability and (as yet) unsustainability of distributed adaptations located on social media. While, as this thesis has argued, social media is brimming with potential as a site for fictional

¹⁴ *SKAM*'s official website can be accessed at 'Skam – Dramaserie På P3.no', accessed 23 February 2017, <http://skam.p3.no/>.

¹⁵ This YouTube channel contains twelve videos documenting the character Costa McClure's efforts to direct a production of Christopher Marlow's *Doctor Faustus*. See 'Zoos Job - YouTube', accessed 22 February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgXkBiKGSXjdSqiGnXNnXGA/videos>.

storytelling, offering new methods of narrative expression which celebrate the confusion of fiction and reality, there is as yet no guarantee that creators will be able to monetise the storytelling ventures they locate on these platforms. Even YouTube, which has established its own thriving economy of content creation, requires proof of a substantial, loyal fan base before allowing users to join its Partner Program and hence to monetise the videos they host on the site.¹⁶ Other platforms offer even less opportunity for financial compensation for any content posted to them, which is at odds with the time-intensive and extensive amount of creative labour demanded by these projects. Consequently, distributed adaptations such as *NMTD* are regularly undertaken as a labour of love – a labour which is threatened with loss(es) because it is produced without any promise of financial reimbursement for the creators' time and effort. While the *Candle Wasters'* success demonstrates that these projects may help amateur creators to establish reputations and make the transition into traditional production industries, their trajectory also signals that the future of this style of storytelling rests with creators whose enthusiasm for exploring the fictional potential of online platforms outweighs their need for monetary reimbursement, at least until such time as they may draw upon the affective attachments of their fan base to fund their future projects.

¹⁶ At the time of writing, those wishing to join the YouTube Partner Program must have over 10,000 subscribers and have logged more than 10,000 hours in watch time over the past year. For more information, see 'Work with the YouTube Partnerships Team - YouTube Help', accessed 22 February 2017, https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6361049#what_we_look_for.

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