Stoking the Flames of the Digital Fireplace.

How can the practice of vlogging contribute to an understanding of the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making?

A Project by Rebecca Bernard
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ATTESTATION

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: *Stoking the Flames of the Digital Fireplace; How can the practice of vlogging contribute to an understanding of the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making?* is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Creative Practice (MCP).

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**Candidate’s declaration**

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2019-1018

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ABSTRACT

Stoking the Flames of the Digital Fireplace is a creative practice based project with an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic focus in which I experiment with and analyse the medium of video-logging (vlogging) on the Youtube platform, interviewing New Zealand vloggers along the way to gain insight into how lifestyle vlogging functions as a means of relating oral histories, and how this new role within modern media impacts on the performance of self, culture and identity. The result of this research is a Youtube channel and specifically, four topic focussed vlogs, as well as the exegesis that discusses my journey and findings.

Figure 2. In the studio (own photo).
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INTRODUCTION/OUTLINE

To begin this project I needed a question that encapsulated my avenues of interest: vlogging as a practice, oral history as a means of understanding our culture from the voices of those living in it, and the art of projecting and presenting your self every day. My question works to understand each part in relation to one another.

I began with the objective of gaining understanding in each element separately, reading works, or watching content relative to the respective area. But I was also aware as I worked in the research element, that with something so visual and alive, such as vlogging, my work and theories would only be understood fully if I undertook the practice myself. Whilst I strove to gain better understanding in the areas, I was simultaneously applying that thinking to the practice itself with ongoing video creation. As I became more comfortable with the creation, my focus moved to formulating questions, found through my research, to ask of other creators that were also working in this medium of vlogging within New Zealand.

My last objective was to take all of my research in the separate areas, relate my findings to each other, and, while also using quotes and thoughts from my interviewees, to write four scripts, three of which aimed to break down components of my question (vlogging, presentation of self and oral history), and the fourth bringing the elements together into a final conclusion.

The hope for this project was to present a product to vloggers, and people interested in vlogging, that would help them to reflect upon their own practice and the different values they apply to it. Presenting the self could not only be a way of providing entertainment, but also a way to reflect upon their own history of self. The online world allows us to share so much and experience a variety of different cultures and people. Just as I have studied the history of New Zealand Cinema to understand my culture further, we should also analyse other forms of media entertainment to understand the contemporary nature of this modern oral history making.

Figure 3. Planning the day (own photo).
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is designed to help the reader understand the major material that helped direct my work and the end product therein. By discussing some of the key thinkers that influenced me, I hope to add that deeper layer of contextualisation to the produced videos. To help the reader follow along with my accompanying videos, my literature review will reflect the order in which I speak about different thinkers within each episode. We began the journey with my reasoning as to why I dove deep into the vlog world, inserting myself as a participant, utilising Clifford Geertz’ method of ‘thick description’. I learnt about his methods from reading his work, and the informative video created by Then & Now; Clifford Geertz: The Interpretation of Cultures (The Balinese Cockfight). For myself and this project, I couldn’t justify forming an opinion on something I had never experienced or contended with first hand. Vlogging is a practice relying on creators and audience members actively participating.

Which brings me to Michael Jackson who expanded these ideas for me in his work Politics of Storytelling (2002). Looking into the work of Hannah Arendt, Jackson states, “Stories are like the coins of the realm, the currency we implicitly agree to make the means of exchange, and, as such, a means of creating a viable social world” (p. 15). Jackson argues that existence is not what you do as an individual but as a group; your existence is more than ‘I’, it is ‘We’. If we consider the YouTube platform in this way, we start to recognise that the ‘We’ is in fact the communities creators build for themselves, and just as Jackson says, the group affirms the existence of the channel and people on it. By joining the world of vlogging, I was creating my own currency in which to spend and receive stories with my audience.

Across the many areas of the YouTube site, the words ‘community’ and ‘culture’ appear, and Kevin Allocca, in his book Videocracy (2018) says, “Our culture is, at least in part defined by how we acquire and share our knowledge, and web video has equipped us with more equitable and personalised access to that knowledge.” (p. 168) Allocca, as head of Culture and Trends at YouTube had a great insight and connection to the platform as a person looking at and building understandings on what made public engagement higher on some videos, whilst lower on others of a similar nature. When reading Allocca’s perspective, you begin to see that so much of what evolves and becomes popular on YouTube is decided by the audience, and the collaboration with creators on defining the roles in which these channels and genres on the platform would play for that audience.

And whose work would be better to read than that of Erving Goffman, a well known sociologist of the twentieth century, when wishing to understand the self and the ‘roles’ we may play? In the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman discusses how, through the lens of the
theatre, we perform different roles depending on our given situation and surroundings. Goffman's theories helped to direct my project towards understanding the role that Vloggers play within modern media culture. Vloggers tell tales of themselves and their surroundings, collecting a personal history in the moment, feeling a validation of self in the world around them.

Liam Bullingham(2013) discusses and applies Erving Goffman's thinking around the “on and off stage self”, saying:

It has been proposed above that online environments provide their users the potential to perform and present different identities. The distance between performer and audience that physical detachment provides makes it easy to conceal aspects of the offline self and embellish the online (p. 2).

We see that the on and offline becomes a form of theatre (just as Erving Goffman claims), where character is curated to connect with the largest audience possible, or to appease the individual who embodies it, thinking they are portraying their true self. The article goes on to say later, “These accounts suggest that there are different gradations in expressions of self and perhaps a thin boundary between persona adoption and more emphasised enhancement of certain aspects of self” (p. 7). Having experienced and worked in the world of theatre, these views of ‘roles’ in the on and offline world immediately connected with me. To build my own characters for a performance, I was taught to study and analyse the mannerisms of real people in situations that my character could/would be in during the story. By watching people, you begin to see the theatre in the everyday world; the forced smiles when you see someone you didn’t expect to see or the posture of someone deeply engrossed in a book in a busy coffee shop, the act of care a retail worker takes when really the relationship they have with you is fleeting and only one of many in their busy day. Life itself is theatre, and a vlogger including a camera in it only changes the direction of the watcher, limited to the boundaries of the cameras lens.

People-watching involves being in the public sphere, and so does the act of vlogging, although in some instances, only after they have edited and posted the material. Vlogs can take place in the home and may never involve another person except the vlogger themselves, depending on what aspects of their lives they are choosing to film; but the moment the content is placed on the YouTube platform, it is part of the public online world with the large audience that may view it. In this day and age, we can apply reactions to content quicker then we have been able to since before the birth of the written novel. For a brief period of time, the written novel and books put storytelling in a structured sphere, we now all actively participate in it once again.
This point is further pushed by a set of articles written for the journal *On the Horizon* (2006). Titled ‘Storytelling in a Liminal Time’ (Sax, Boria/p. 146-177), the articles discuss how storytelling works within the modern information age. “Books serve to contain or ‘package’ experience, so that it may be stored and examined at leisure. Computers, by contrast, participate in the continuous flow of events.”(p. 148). The creating of history is happening at a rate like never before thanks to computers and modern technology, for in every act and role we play in the on-and-offline worlds is an act of history creation, even if it feels on the smallest scale.

With all these modern technologies helping us present our everyday lives, whether through YouTube, Instagram, Twitter etc., we are creating un-ending layers to ourselves, something that Bruce Lambert discusses in relation to Goffman’s thinking, in a video (uploaded in April of 2017) entitled *Presentation of Self and Impression Management: Erving Goffman’s Sociology*. He makes the point that life is a stage and it is full of many players. In every social situation we are performing to a role that suits the given environment and context we are surrounded by. Another major point he discusses is that it’s hard to define an authentic self because our identity is so reliant on who we are in multiple different instances when we perform socially. To Lambert, we are not a fruit with a stone at the centre, the flesh forming around our core self, we are more like an onion, and with every layer we pull off, there are more layers. ‘Vlogger’ is just one role this group of people play, and you see glimpses of the others they inhabit within their videos when they talk to family and friends. Vlogs effectively capture an individual performing a role in the social world.

Lambert isn’t the only example I found on the YouTube platform either. A channel entitled, *Oralhistorycentre*, had a short video that tries to explain what oral history is as a practice and research method. For them, this research method is a means to understand an individual’s lived experiences through the eyewitness to it, the individual interviewed. This example was a great quick reference for any vloggers interested in my project that wanted a basis for my inclusion of oral history, as I began to show that the roles they played were something that could be used as a historical account of what society or a culture looked like through an individual’s videos. Researchers wouldn’t necessarily need to interview people to understand their outlook on life. Kenneth Kann believed people with ‘colorful perspectives’ sold their narratives so much more to an oral historian, for the act of reciting their life in the interviews is also a form of storytelling. *Reconstructing the History of a Community* (Kenneth Kann,1981), really brought to light the essence of what I want to say about the vlogging practice and the narratives within. Vlogs are not only historical texts but ones backed by the strong roles built for them. The vlogger only shows a portion of the layers and context that creates their entire being, but the accounts they do leave us are still interesting texts and reflections on not only the community they exist physically in, but
also the online community they build upon. They speak not only as eyewitness to their lives, they show you it too.

According to Sir John Rankine (Jack) Goody, author of *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (2010), “Life histories do not emerge automatically; they are heavily constructed.” (p. 132). When we strip away all the mechanics behind what a vlogger does, the camera, the lights, the context of the screen, it comes down to them narrating a portion of their lives, whether in a past or present tense. So Kann and Goody help us to understand that orality and oral history collecting are constructed and edited, much like any text could be, even if what we are dealing with is the speech of man rather than a written text, but Walter J. Ong, who was an American scholar, priest, historian and philosopher was the man to coin the phrase ‘secondary orality’. In his book, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Ong explains the journey of man through his beginnings in oral centred societies to written ones, and now seemingly back to oral but informed by the written. Without writing we would not have developed our prowess in science and technology as we have; therefore the things we use to spread our stories, the sound of our stories such as the telephone, the radio, television, rely on the written world for their creation, but with the audio as means of delivery. That’s what secondary orality means to Ong, relying now on the word of the written to inform the delivery of the oral.

I draw on *The Handbook of Oral History* (Thomas L. Charlton, 2008) as my final example of the function and act of oral history collecting. Charlton has a passion for the practice, believing in its potential to help us bring forth the voices of the past to inform the present. The act of someone talking, telling their story, should always give them the ability to transform lives through the simple act of listening, and it’s my strong belief that vlogging can grant that opportunity, just as Charlton thought. When we watch vlogs, we can’t talk to the person directly, we watch, we listen, and if we are patient, we wait until the end to make a comment on the video.

This led into my last video, where I began tying together the points from the previous videos, starting with the thinking of Kenneth Goldsmith. For Goldsmith, during the creation of his book, *Wasting Time on the Internet* (2016), which began with a class under the same name, he began to understand that in the modern world we can, and often do, exist in two places simultaneously; the physical and the digital world. This for me is represented so well in the lives of vloggers who play out their roles online and offline. Even in the moments they aren’t filming, they are most always in arm’s reach of a device that can give them access to their channel and audience. Just as Ong saw connections between the oral and the written worlds, and Charlton the spoken and the heard, Goldsmith encapsulates the worlds of the on and offline as co-existing entities. Once an individual becomes connected to both so thoroughly as a vlogger would, it is
hard to make oneself separate from either, “Straddling the physical and the digital, we’re inhabiting many spaces at the same time in ways that were unthinkable a decade ago.” (p. 176).

Bryan Alexander brilliantly explains what this action does to narrative, “The social media world has made the outer frontier of stories porous. Where a story begins and ends, what a container is that holds a narrative: these questions are more difficult to answer than before.” (p. 125). Alexander’s focus in his book, *The New Digital Storytelling* (2011), is to help the reader to find tools within their field of interests, that define this new wave of online narrative. If we cannot be separate from it, as Goldsmith says, let us understand how to use it and define it for ourselves, which is a lot of the focus of my own project.

In fact, it is very hard to deny the fact that narrative itself is always developing and changing, considering that technology is always doing so too. The tools we use to enhance our work and practices shape their own evolution, but they also begin to shape us as users too, as explained by Wilson Miner in *When We Build* (2011). Indeed, just as Benedict Anderson points out in his work, *Imagined Communities* (2006), as our tools develop on an individual basis, the effect may also inform the lives of a community at large. Anderson and Miner reflect on the favoured tools of different eras, e.g. the development of writing and more modern technologies of radio, television and the internet. Just as the defining of the written form of a language helped those of many different dialects within that realm connect, so too does the engine of the online YouTube world. We are always a product of the world we live in, and the communities we involve ourselves in.

By clicking, ‘I Agree’ to the terms that YouTube gives you when you sign up, you have agreed to become part of that community. You needn’t know everyone on the platform to belong. You are not obliged to comment on every video, to know the first names of the people you watch. But in the back of your mind sits the knowledge that you are part of this ever-changing entity, full of the voices and lives of others. What I understand through Anderson’s work posits that a community, and identities associated with it, can exist if it is imagined to exist. If people are communicating, there can be community. Vlogging offers a form of communication that differs from the entertainment of a play or television show. What we watch on the screen is someone’s life, not just a narrative. We are given permission as the audience, as this person’s community through the camera, to step into their shoes and experience their life as they live it. Vlogging may seem like a rather base form of entertainment to some, but it is grabbing hold of tools proven through time, it takes the self under its wing to present a newly embodied role, it dabbles in the currency of stories and it allows us to experience history as it is happening.
“There is no original self separate from performances of self, as there is no self without the social world. We are embedded within the social structure of our culture.” (p.471)
METHODOLOGY

I utilised a practice based approach with an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic focus for this project. As can probably be easily seen and understood of my project, I lean heavily on performing and screen arts practice throughout this project, including interviews and the creation of vlogs. Given the iterative and process driven nature of this research, the practice based research methodology folded in exceptionally well as the basic approach to answering my research question. Methods included desk research, filming, editing, posting and then analysing the process of my vlogging. Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds (2016) show that practice and research through a project may generate new knowledge in a manner that an audience interested in the product or artefact produced may interact and scrutinise it. I vlogged not only to generate new knowledge for myself but equally for other vloggers.

Ethnography and auto-ethnography are a central focus for my practice based research, given my interest in generating understandings for a vlogger community around the presentation of self as oral historymaking on the YouTube platform. This focus allowed me to use a research lens that looks deeply at human experience, interactions with each other, and social constructions cultures place on those so willing to share themselves publicly. This qualitative approach is interested in the researcher’s own reflections on self immersion in a specific human community (vloggers on YouTube). It grants me the ability to use my own experiences as well as those of peers within the field as a point of research. You can see me use this approach throughout my videos as I comment on the filming/editing process, as well as the experience of presenting myself online. Autoethnography also lends itself to performing interviews, as presented in the book, *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (2015). Interviews within this field can fall under the umbrella of oral histories, personal narratives, or topical interviews, all of which applied to my work and interest in the vlogging field well.

It was important to me to utilise methods and a platform that would allow for broad accessibility, since this research concerns a social phenomenon that is being undertaken not only by individuals in New Zealand, but on a global scale. Marrying both practice and research together, I created a project that critically looked at the vlogging practice from the outside, but also from within through my own generated material within the field. The project was then made accessible to the intended audience as a contribution back to the community of research and practice. In becoming part of the vlogging community myself, my hope is that my findings are not only relevant and useful to me and my creative practice, but also resonate with other vloggers around me.
ETHICS

UREC Approval Number 2019-1018

Involving interviews with NZ YouTube vloggers, this project was granted ethics approval on the 9th of September, 2019. As a large part of this project lives on the YouTube platform, I made sure to always consider community and YouTube guidelines for uploading of content and interacting with other creators. Participants were all fully informed and gave consent for their contribution to this research project. See Appendix for details.

DISCUSSION

The Beginnings

To answer the question, ‘How can the practice of vlogging contribute to an understanding of the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making?’ it is perhaps best to start from my own personal beginnings and the elements that drove me towards this masters and question. I’m very much of the belief that stories are the life blood of what it is to be a human. And that is in every sense of the word story; whether the classical thinking of a structured narrative in a book, play or speaker next to the fire, or in the seas of personal narrative that a child tells their parent when they ask, “So what did you do today at school?”. We are taught from such a young age to narrate our lives through play. For example, by making our toys act out scenes of the world we know, like how I would make my teddy bears eat bread and pretend they were receiving the Eucharist at church. It’s how we relate, understand more deeply and satisfy our need for creation, through stories.

With this in mind, it makes sense that as I grew, writing, playing and developing my own stories, I would find interest in the world of vloggers who show and speak about their daily life in such a public manner. I wanted to understand what it meant to share stories on a platform like YouTube where your audience isn’t someone sharing the same space as you or even being a physical part of your daily life. The act of vlogging sits between the experiences of telling mum about how lame maths class was and the new age world of the online presence in photos and updates, tweets and posts. This was what I spent the first episode of my project trying to explain and breakdown for the viewer. It wasn’t until I spent more time during the beginning months of my research that I realised that a lot of the information you find on YouTube, when typing in the search bar for information on vlogging, is actually more in line with a ‘How To’ or ‘Things You Will Need’ video than a breakdown of the practice itself. Since I wanted to know how the
‘practice of vlogging’ functioned as a term within my question, I set out to explore different avenues of garnering that data.

Data Gathering and Defining the Vlog

My first method was to take still frames from twenty-five different vlogs at 4:30 into the clip. I took inspiration for this from my cinema studies during my bachelor, and also from Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, author of Everybody Lies: What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are (2017). Stephens-Davidowitz interests unfold in his work, with his reflections on how ‘Big Data’ can help us see how we evolve and grow as a species in cyberspace. He states how the data we can access on the internet allows us to meaningfully zoom in on smaller pockets of data to gain new insights into who we are and how we interact with the environment around us. By pausing these clips and selecting aspects of the frame, then pulling out to see what that meant as I lay my findings side by side, I could begin to see the layers of what it is to be a vlogger.

From this point, I decided to take those same twenty-five vlogs and watch them in their entirety, to answer more aspects for myself, such as:

- Is this piece personal or experience based?
- Is it filmed in single or multiple days?
- Is the creator central to the frame for more or less than half the clip?
- Do they directly look at and speak to the audience through the camera?
- Are events planned and discussed before being shown in the video or are they spontaneous?

The findings from these observations were extremely rich, as I not only had an understanding of expectations within single frames, but also within the whole of the end product. When considering my own vlogs against the data before and after collating it, I also could see the patterns in my own creations, which led to the three criteria I set down in my episode, The Practice of Vlogging (2020).

1. Vlogs are about following a creator throughout their day, with themselves as a central focus of narrative, whether that is in an experience or personal based context.
2. Vloggers also tend to acknowledge their audience within their videos, because vlogging is a social practice.
3. Vlogging is the practice of affirming identity for both a creator and audience.

To explain my reasoning for number one, I can easily reference back to my data, showing that even when the camera isn’t on them, the vlogger, they are still the element that binds it all
together, for the narrative of the vlog is either happening to or around them. They are also in control of the editing, framing, and soundscape, building the piece from a perspective of their choosing. The content in the vlogs themselves can vary, but can generally be split between experience based (things happening to a vlogger, who captures it in that moment), or personal based (recounting and relating important parts of a day to your audience, or relating actions to personal history not seen on screen. The audience being told why something matters to a creator).

Out of the twenty-five vlogs, only two did not directly refer to the audience, or speak to the camera as if to another person. These two were heavily experience based, doing a heavily edited set to music piece about a holiday in Ibiza, the other showing live interaction with fans and friends. These examples still fit well within the vlogging categories as they stand, as personal stylisation of narrative is also extremely important to the YouTube platform.

Identity and Audience

To further prove my three points in the understanding of vlogging, I’m going to breakdown and reference Casey Neistat’s video, *I’m Leaving NYC forever*. Posted in May of 2019, it shook his audience, as though he had teased in the past about leaving New York City for short periods of time, he always returned to his beloved studio and city to film his life. Neistat’s channel is dedicated to the vlogging format, having started it as a challenge to himself in March of 2015 to post a vlog, or ‘movie’ as he also calls it, everyday for as long as he feels like it. His playlist folder, Vlog, now has 490 videos in it, all movies focusing on what he is experiencing or creating on any given day or time. He is the element that drives the narrative and connects each video as one long cohesive storyline following his life. Going back to his first ever vlog, Neistat directly looks and talks to you, the audience, about his expectations for his filming and his reasoning behind starting the channel, bringing you in to his life in a conversational manner. The same essence and style he presents in his first video is not far off the format he has now.

Having had a background in cinematography and storytelling for the big screen, Neistat understood that the decisions he makes when framing, filming and editing will inform the character on the screen, also being aware that in this instance, the character is himself. There are a lot of people on YouTube that attribute his success on the platform to his well-defined style. Other creators look to Casey as an example of a great entertainer and storyteller, some even making videos about how you can film and create content like him. He grabbed his initial audience with his film language, choosing the right beats to show a beautiful view of the skyline, the right lulls in the piece to capture the audience’s attention with a quick cut back to his narrative. But the reason people stayed, and the reason he has 12 million subscribers, is because
of not only the imagery, but the content. Because of Neistat's natural charisma and ability to take handheld cameras with him everywhere, viewers were treated to a viewpoint of New York they hadn’t seen before.

Casey Neistat captures the life of New York in a unique way by filming himself riding his skateboard through traffic, speaking to his mailman on camera in numerous different vlogs and showing his daily lived experience as a family man and entrepreneur in the city. By showing us parts of New York not seen in holidays and brief visits, Neistat carved a special unique role in his vlogs that wove his personality with his geographical location. This is why when he did announce that his time was up in New York, and that him and his family would be moving to Los Angeles, people struggled to see Casey without the city.

Neistat's narrative had been intertwined for so long with that of the city that the idea of him taking that element out of his videos made his audience members genuinely upset, begging him not to go. People had changed their whole lifestyle to be closer to him, be a part of his city without having met him or shaken his hand before. Neistat's audience was constantly acknowledged within his videos, with him directly addressing camera often. One of the things known most about him is that fact that he wears sunglasses in so many of his clips. I had always been taught that this was rude as a child, to hide your eyes when addressing someone, but Neistat is doing it so that he can be as close to you as possible without losing his grip on his beautiful

Figure 5. Neistat's announcement (screenshot, 2020).

Figure 6. Neistat follower (screenshot, 2020).
imagery. By wearing sunglasses, he can look directly at the framing of the camera to make sure he is in focus and that the elements in the background don’t take away from his moment in front of camera, while simultaneously making the audience feel like they have his full attention and like he is looking directly at them. It’s one of the many secrets Neistat has revealed over the course of his video making that enables him to grab a firm hold on his audience and keeping them feeling as if they are an important person in his daily life.

Casey Neistat is a fantastic example of a vlogger who follows all three rules I have proposed. He is the central focus of his narrative, a sociable person who speaks directly to his audience through the screen, and someone who built an identity around his channel, New York City, cinematography and life. His collection of works offers a unique viewpoint of what life is in the ‘Big Apple’ whilst trying to survive as a creator, raising a family and starting a business. If someone in the next fifty-years wished to understand what a New Yorker’s life was like in the early 2000’s, Neistat provides us a window and a historical account from a unique perspective.

Vloggers and the Life Mix

For me, watching vloggers develop through my ten years of viewing, the act of vlogging connects as entertainment but also as a form of education as I watched and learned how others lived in other countries, climates and communities. Because anyone with a camera, internet access and a Google account can (in theory) create a channel and record themselves, there is an opportunity of seeing countries, cities and even small towns from the perspective of multiple inhabitants. Much as Neistat may show the life of a New Yorker, others may also show it from their own angle. Each person experiences the world from a perspective only they have, as even though we all exist in this space together, we have different collections of things that inform who we are, a mix of liveable experiences.

Vlogging fits perfectly into the idea of the ‘life mix’ as presented by Sherry Turkle in her work, *Alone Together* (2011). We have no singular self and life in the 20th century; those with access to a cell phone may be living several different performances of themselves simultaneously. Whilst travelling to visit family on Christmas day, I can be present in the car with my partner, singing along to the music and the Spongebob Christmas re-mix he found, whilst I also film myself and send it to others as a form of entertainment, thinking how my friends I’ve made through the

![Figure 7. Neistat and New York City (screenshot, 2020).](image)
online Dungeons and Dragons server would find it funny. I can be interrupted by a phone call from my mum asking me how far away we are as my partner politely turns down the music, acknowledging me slipping into a separate world of a conversation with her. Within minutes I have not only built my enjoyment for the day but lived in many places near simultaneously through the technology in my hand. When I began adding a camera in to my daily routine, although strange at first, it became just another self to live and slip in and out of. Another addition to my ‘life mix’ of emails, Facebook, gaming identity and so on.

Turkle is fascinated by how technology acts on us, wondering and writing about what the connection to the screen we have built has done to culture and society. Showing how our relationship to technology has developed, she points out that early toys that were adapting modern technology were designed for users to take care of them, trying to show that we could nurture these 8-bit pixel creatures with devices such as the Tamagotchi. After learning how to nurture technology, we learned how it could nurture us back. It’s hard for me to consider not having my phone on me constantly now, whereas my relationship with my first cellphone was far different. The most it was used was during free texting weekends before I’d get bored and go roller blading up and down our street with my sisters. My current phone is now a way for me to stay immediately connected to those same siblings, sending videos, photos and jokes to one another nearly every single day in our group chat. Knowing my sisters are just a message away comforts me when I’m facing difficult moments in health or work. Although I would rather see them face to face, when the screen lights up, I can know that they are thinking of me a city away and that I’m not truly alone.

The technology we had to learn to nurture now comforts us, and what was once considered by Erving Goffman as the self on and off stage, has made our life mix a far more complicated show with theatrics in the rafters, revolving sets within seconds, cameras that follow us off stage during our quick change and a curtain that seems to never close. We live so much online as we go about our offline life. I’ve tried to argue that this is why Vlogging is a fascinating medium to consider as historical recount. It records the person slipping between selves as they live out their day. We all live life from our own perspective but sitting back and writing in your diary allows you to frame it in the manner you feel you believe is true, whereas sitting down to edit shows you the rawness of your lived experience. The edit is the chance to curate, to present your history as you see it. You may trim that which you do not feel adds to the narrative, cut your sentences down to make you sound more succinct, but even those choices present a version of yourself you have chosen for history. Just as Casey Neistats edits presented his relationship with his home in New York, other vloggers may show and put forth the edit of performance that most suits what they
believe as the person that stars in their life show. Vloggers use technology as a way of nurturing identity much as humanity has throughout time by using art.

In *New Keywords, A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2005) edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris, they discuss the history and development of many keywords, my main focus here being their discussion on culture. Discussing the thinking of Friedrich Schiller, they state, “This meant that the experience of art could be transformed into one of self-improvement, as the person would aim to close the gap between their rough empirical self and the poise and harmony represented by the work of art.”(p. 66) Explaining how as culture developed over time as a term, it presented forth an opportunity for individuals to reflect on themselves and their work to see which cultural categories they fit into, you could begin to navigate all of the selves you had, material, social and spiritual, through your art. Vlogging’s use of film and technology grants the tools by which to paint your self-portrait, a picture of the ‘improved’ you to fit within the medium of YouTube. One of the things I found interesting when focusing on data gathering was the variety of places that vlogs can come from, and yet how similar they can be. These last few generations to walk the earth and grow up with cameras have been subliminally taught how to present narrative in this form. *New Keywords* also touches on this, and that things like cultural production and cultural consumption actually hinder the true definition of culture as one cannot distinguish from what is real, and what is the rest. Platforms such as YouTube show the intensity of cultural markets, where Americans can influence those from their own country, but equally others. British vloggers can influence Kiwis, Australians affect Americans and so on. By studying the oral history of vloggers and their life mixes, we can see the effect of marketable cultures and selves being acted out in real time.

Our life mixes are far more complicated then they use to be when coupled with this notion of an open cultural market. It is part of why my question is framed the way it is, with the inclusion of ‘contemporary’ when considering oral history. It is also why I so strongly stated the quote from Jack Goody in both my YouTube video, *Speaking the History of Us* (2020), and within my literature review; we will always construct our own version of our life history, whether in the classical recording fashion of oral history or the editing of vloggers. If I’m to consider myself as a contemporary oral historian, then I should allow the people I study to speak of their life in the manner of their choosing, taking not only what is said into account, but also how it presented within their broader life mix. This way I can acknowledge the self-commentary on who they are, the position from which they speak and show their life, and the world of technology we now live in.
The Existential Commercialised Self

It would be hard to discuss vlogging without relating some of the more sinister and questionable sides of the practice. The reality of posting your life narrative in a recurring fashion can lead to issues both for yourself and with the people that consume it. As all of my interviewees confirmed, you cannot assume that the person on the screen is the entirety of who they are, and just because you feel like you know them and share a kinship with the individual you watch, it doesn’t mean they know you at all. Although I argue that vlogging presents interesting views on an individual’s life mix, it is still a front stage performance, as they are always aware of the camera. But even with the camera present, individuals within this practice so often reveal things to their audience that would seem like facts you would only share with close family and friends.

Family vlogging channel SacconneJoly, which launched on the platform in December of 2009, had been regularly uploading content dedicated to their experience as husband and wife, including in 2016 when they sadly had a miscarriage with their third baby. Being a channel dedicated to showing a happy Irish family living in England, the fact that they were willing to share some of the heart break and healing process they went through with this experience really speaks to the power of the platform to connect creators and audiences.

John Suler may argue that what Jonathan and Anna, the couple that run this channel, are experiencing in these moments, and throughout their channel, is the ‘disinhibition effect’. In his online article, *The Online Disinhibition Effect* (2001), Suler discusses how we as individuals can interact with the online world in a variety of ways and sometimes will reveal more of who we are online than off. Instead of having to see someone reacting immediately to our actions or words, as you would in a face to face conversation, the delay in response to reception of your opinion or voice, such as when people come across your Facebook post hours after you originally sent it out to your public sphere, means you don’t necessarily feel the need to guard or cater yourself to the needs of others in that moment. You need not feel the pressure of other aspects of your life mix and may be more uninhibited in your outward performance. In something Suler describes as benign disinhibition, you may even feel more of a desire to explore and discover new kinds of identity, learning new ways to solve issues and be closer to the person you wish to be. Because Jonathan and Anna want to present the idea of a cohesive and happy family unit, they have slowly over time revealed more of the problems that go on when the camera is turned off. Jonathan especially will speak to the way talking to the camera will help him express himself when he is troubled, more so than talking to a close friend, because he doesn’t want to appear troubled or unhappy to others.

This disinhibition may be a two-sided ordeal in some cases, however. As individuals reveal themselves more and more openly within their videos as a form of healing through narrative and
expression, we do see more and more of their lives, a fact that has created critiques when it comes to family channels such as the SacconeJolys. For some parents, their children really are their whole world, and it would only seem natural to share not only their life, but how their children’s lives interweave with their own. Jonathan and Anna have vlogs of the most important moments in

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 8.** The next generation (screenshot, 2020).

their children’s lives. From first pregnancy test to birth, to baby first words and steps. So much is public to their audience because in their eyes, that is the life they live and the thing they want to share. There is a distinct difference between sharing intimate details of your baby’s life with family than with an audience of essentially strangers though. The viewers and subscribers they have gained over time, for the most part, take joy in watching the family grow and seeing how the kids develop and change as the years pass, but there are those that would fall under Suler’s idea of toxic disinhibition. These people are aware of their anonymity. They exist as a text with no face in the comment section, ridiculing the family and saying horrible things about the children and couple. The couple have had to deal with individuals, that only know them through the vlogging side of their world, contacting the children’s school to get their personal information and police getting called to the house on child abuse calls. Social media has granted them the
ability to build themselves up and create an identity as a family on joy and love whilst these people they would describe as ‘internet trolls’ try to tear it down.

Obviously there is some moral ambiguity when considering that their children, who cannot consent from a place of adult understanding to their image being shared so openly for such large portions of time. In the case of some other family vlogging channels, the videos they have released have led to arrests and the children being removed from their care. In one of the most public cases of this occurring, in 2017 the channel DaddyOfive, a family vlog and prank channel, had the wider public revolt against them after PhilipDeFranco, a well-known YouTube news reporting channel, exposed them for the physical and mental abuse they would put their five children through for entertainment and views. The children were eventually all removed from the pair as they face criminal charges for their actions; actions which are so grotesque in my eyes it is a wonder that they had a following of dedicated fans at all. It’s a sad reality that many people start vlogging channels with the intention of just recording and telling their story for themselves for their own entertainment but change their focus to the wider public as they begin to earn money. What begins as benign disinhibition changes to toxic. With the intermingling of cultures and perspectives on the YouTube platform, people with toxic intent may find others of a like mind easily.

I tried to be conscious of this within my own work, and because of my own feelings around that aspect of children in entertainment (which is heavily informed by my film practice and the rules we uphold in that industry for child safety) I endeavoured to never show the faces of either of my nephews within my vlogs. Even within the masters videos, the two segments that do include imagery of them, I ensured one clip was over five years old and that the other image was not a front-on still image of my younger nephews face, and even that image was shown to my sister to gain her permission for its use. Conversations around aspects such as this within the vlogging sphere are always fascinating to me, as the intent of the medium is to reveal the performance of your life. But where is the line between showing something because it is happening to you, and revealing too much of others that do not have control of the output of those narratives?

All my interviews also revealed that they had different elements of their lives they would not reveal, or rules that they had in place to make sure that the filming they undertook was at the comfort of others. One endeavoured to never show the identity of the parents they lived with, as a sign of respect to their wish to not be on social media. Another acknowledged that some of their close friend group loved being in videos with them, whereas others they politely filmed around, as it made them uncomfortable. The last expressed that, as they filmed so often out and about, they would email some places in advance to ask if they could film or speak directly to
business owners to get permission. But even with all these safety measures, it is common that some lines can be crossed by audience members that expect more from you because they invest in your narrative and world so whole-heartedly.

I titled this segment the ‘existential commercial self’ because we currently live in an age where our own selves are a commodity with which to make money. Personally, I think there is a large range of vloggers who do not have this goal in mind but are also aware that they are not owned entirely by themselves anymore. They express the feeling that they must create for the audience that invests time and love into them. One of my interviewees discussed how they had two channels, one for vlogging what made them happy, and one that they had spent time building and gaining an audience for that they now considered a side occupation. The need to create new material and generate new ideas for videos for the second audience was fun for them, but taxing as well, as they felt they owed those viewers entertainment every week for getting their channel to the level it is at. Going back to the reading I spoke of in Politics of Storytelling (2002), it is obvious that this interviewee did feel the strain of their existence being tied to their audience, as a ‘We’ rather than an ‘I’.

Because of the feeling of friendship vloggers present through their videos, beginning with “Hello again!” and finishing with a “See you next time!” an audience can feel like they are part of something and a close and intimate friend with the creator, especially when we consider the examples of Casey Neistat and Jonathan and Anna SacconeJoly. You, as the audience, are now part of their spoken and filmed history.

As a last example of the existential commercial self and how ones audience can directly interact/interfere with those on the screen, I would like to directly reference a video posted by Julien Solomita, on his channel of the same name, in September of 2017. The video entitled, don’t come to our house, is a short four-minute video were he directly asks his fans, and the fans of his

partner Jenna Mourey, (channel name Jenna Marbles) to not come to their house. Julien had been
daily vlogging for a period of time leading up to this moment, but he had obviously had enough
when posting this particular piece to camera. A woman approached him while he was getting
packages from his front door asking if this was where his partner lived while her young son, a fan,
waited in the car. Julien spends time in the video apologising to the child on the behalf of the
woman claiming that, as a parent, she is at fault for teaching her son that invading someone else’s
privacy and making them feel unsafe in their own home is ‘okay’ to do. Vloggers continually
contend with knowing whether they have shown too much or too little. Both individuals had
never filmed the front entrance and garden of the house as a means to hopefully make it harder
for people to find out where they lived, but to fans that feel they know you and are close to you, it
was no barrier to finding that address.

If we are to understand what modern media and creation of content such as vlogs can do
to peoples well-being and presentation of self, you need to look no further than the defeated and
and equally frustrated posture of Solomita as he thinks through what he will say in this video. If
oral history wishes to capture the nuances of contemporary life, viewing these vlogs and
analysing the presentation of self on the screen is a fascinating place to start.

Figure 11. Don’t come to our house (screenshot, 2020).
Product Creation

This project had a few interesting phases to go through before arriving at the product I created for the YouTube platform. So much of the journey to final output was finding the balance of the three elements of my question; how much did the element of the presentation of self play into oral history? Was vlogging an accurate representation of a creators whole self in history, or only part? The actual filming style for the videos covering the separate elements of my question also changed as I leaned in to one facet or another. My initial intention was to stay as practitioner in the field of vlogging, somehow marrying the vlog style of following someone around for the day as I try and speak about the research and findings I had collected in a masterly academic manner. The tests proved that although this concept could potentially work, it was limiting in its ability to be free and fluid as the vlog would be, for I was trying to include quotes, complex thinking, imagery of the people I had researched from and so forth. The medium would work at a push, but it wouldn't represent my project or me as a researcher as fully as I hoped.

The next phase was to take away the narrative storybook-like elements I tried to include in my intros, for I still considered it important to maintain that feeling of my interest into the spoken story. But the scripts felt clichéd and forced, with the vlog component, important when I began my masters, not translating as well alongside the structured research discussion. At this point I had completed the test footage, attempted to edit it together and finally acknowledged that what I was trying to say, though important to myself, was also bigger than myself. Instead of being so close to the material I had to step back and reflect on it.

Which is when the idea struck of reflection as anthropologist leaving the field to inform others of their research. From then on, the scripts began to evolve in to a space I felt much more comfortable in, that would still keep the feel of YouTube friendly content, with quirks and silly editing techniques, but also harness the act of video essay or structured reflection and recollection.

The Stylisation

Having confirmed the method upon which the scripts would work, it came time to find the tone and style for the work to fit with visually. Again, the testing period was important to this as it showed me that the style common to vlogging wouldn’t complement the heavy material I planned to cover. Which is why I had to reconsider the idea of me filming this with only one person assisting. I’ve admitted during my own vlogs before that my main bulk of training in the film field through completing the Film and Television Bachelor at Unitec, was that of production.
I knew and understood how to produce a piece of content through the paperwork, but my skills within the actual technological aspects of recording and editing were not as advanced. It was one of the reasons why I chose to become so involved in creating my own vlog content; as a way of improving my skill. I could theoretically film all the scripts myself but if I wanted my work to reflect my research, it was time to bring in some experts. I asked graduates of Unitec Screen Arts to assist me with the filming process, showing them the creative style I was after.

Combining the formal style of David Letterman’s interviews with the staging of Ted Talk and the YouTube channel Polygons research series, Unraveled, I set out to find a happy medium of front and back stage, well presented and YouTube friendly. With all this in mind, we began to map out what we were looking to film for the studio on campus.

**The Execution and Set**

Throughout my video creation time I’ve tried to keep it as authentically me as possible. For the end product, I wanted to be able to incorporate myself and the build-up of vlogs as a repository of documentation to uplift my examples within the heavier research conversations.
Even though I consider myself an academic, I’m aware I play the role of creative too, and that was what I tried to draw forth in my choices for the end product.

The studio filming had to strike the right balance between the Rebecca that was in the vlogs, and the Rebecca reflecting on the vlogging process itself. By beginning my first episode in the manner of the vlog; by exiting the door of the known space, and entering the new, I physically moved the audience with me on my journey. And from there, I attempted to maintain vlog elements where I could. In discussions with the team, we concluded that any element filmed on the central carpeted area, with the couch, would be handheld, to give the sense of the vlogger in motion. Any other elements filmed would be stationary, to lend themselves to signify the ‘structure’ of my research.

Each location within the studio space was placed for different reasons. The central space was the ‘home turf’ where I could sit and both discuss with the audience some of the thinkers I’d come across and also reflect on my own work and different elements discussed. The bookshelves were a physical representation of the reading done, and the kind of environment I choose to work in when researching. Plants, knick-knacks and books brought together different elements of myself, with my love for nature, art and literature. Many of the books featured that aren’t directly linked to the content are heirlooms from my grandmother, adding a layer of family history to the space, much as the painting of fruit does in the central area, also painted by the same grandmother. It was important to me to build in elements that implied connections beyond the set itself. The green screen was for those moments where the subjects being covered could lean on visual texts outside the immediate set, and to add some interest to the work to keep my audience engaged.

And lastly, there was the digital fireplace itself. I knew from the outset I wanted to incorporate the name of the channel, and that I would discuss the reasoning behind the naming

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*Figures 18, 19 and 20. Continuity in set (own photos).*
within the piece, so why not make it a place within the room I could turn to and give a nod to the storytelling I have put out in the world?

The set itself gave me so much joy in creating, and I loved that it straddled the line between being a space full of home comforts and personal history, and a space for working on this serious material.

Filming this was a hard process. I wore the hats of director, producer, clapper loader, actor, and art director. Having come from the film and television Bachelor and only being behind the camera, essentially doing the paperwork, it was a hard fought joy to be able to create what I wanted, and my crew was nothing but respectful and supportive along the way. There are perhaps some elements I would do differently, now having the chance to think back, but overall, I’m happy with what we achieved. I learnt so much more about my own craft by just doing it.

It took place over four days, over a weekend with a week break before filming again the next weekend.

**The Interviews**

It took a while to find the right means to include the interview element within the actual videos. The material garnered from the interviews themselves was invaluable, and I hope I’ve done them justice in the manner of inclusion. To follow the ethics agreement with Unitec to the best degree without losing the essence of the person behind the statements and keeping the tone right for the YouTube platform, it was decided we would re-record the statements with actors, and then show the audio waveforms of the actors’ voices in place of the actual interviews.

**The Editing**

I wanted to find a happy medium between a curated academic piece and something YouTube friendly that represented my personality well. We went for a quick cutting method, keeping to the rhythm of a lot of modern vlogs, whilst also leaning-in to the academic styles of the platform, with the use of green screen insertion, overlapping imagery and music to guide between points. *Unraveled*, which was referenced above as an influence for the look, inspired the editing portion as well.

As mentioned above, it was important for me to be able to build my personality through the editing as well, for a narrative is only as good as its narrator. That’s why I endeavoured to build into the editing moments where I spoke directly to my crew or interacted with the environment around me, such as the beginnings and endings of each episode.

To make the best use of my skills, my editor Tommy did the majority of the finer cutting and technical editing that I wanted for the product, allowing me to step back in both a director
and assistant role. I would source the necessary extra footage and elements needed, place everything in folder systems within the project, and mark up within the footage itself which takes I liked. He would then come into the suite and incorporate the footage I’d specified. Due to a variety of different reasons, Tommy ended up taking all the footage home with him, along with the current project cuts. It was lucky he took all of it when he did because we only managed two more in-person sessions before the March Covid-19 lockdown.

The learning curve at this point for the both of us was steep as we began to figure out the best way to view, critique and continue editing the pieces. We utilised the newly placed screen sharing service that the Discord application offered due to the outbreak so I could guide him through new editing elements. The newest cuts would then be placed unlisted on my YouTube account where I could view them and make notes associated to time code points within the clip. Considering the difficult situation in which we found ourselves, I’m still extremely happy with the ingenuity and dedication we both showed to produce a creative product. It gave me purpose through the lockdown and I’ve learnt so much about myself as a creator and director now.

The Posting Process

It was an exciting moment to finally schedule my videos to go public! I decided to release them at 7pm for four days in a row. This way I had the opportunity of building expectation and audience interest, without leaving too long between videos for them to lose some of the new knowledge they had gained from the previous one. On the fourth afternoon, a dear friend decided to host a watch party of all three previous episodes and the fourth as it went live.
idea of watching my own content with my friends live was an extremely bizarre thing to get my head around, but it was a fantastic enjoyable evening filled with support and questions around my project and the elements discussed in the video.

Aside from this live screening, I’ve been receiving commentary on the videos speaking on how interesting my work and research was and how I managed to pose questions in one episode and answer them within the next. This commentary is invaluable as it shows that I was delivering a concise storyline across the episodes, as well as building engagement with each instalment. A few of my friends have said that they are now interested in trying out vlogging for themselves, which is an amazing thing to consider.

Figure 22. The very best fan club (screenshot, 2020).

Changing the Tool

The process and creation of the four videos was an extremely rewarding path, and I am glad to have spent my masters exploring this field. It is something I was trained to consider more in depth when doing my Bachelors; to ask oneself why you enjoy a film. By understanding what exactly is being satisfied when you watch a film you may better understand your own values and identity. When I then think about how many views are happening every single day on vlog
material, it really is a staggering amount of people who invest in watching a strangers life unfold before them on the screen. To try and understand that sense of enjoyment for myself, but also for the wider community, can reveal fascinating things about the development of identity in a world of instant connection, whether you view the term connection as referring to technology or to people.

I spend the last episode discussing and comparing YouTube’s mission statement, where they outline four core elements as the four freedoms of YouTube, with what the U.S. History Scene website states in their field overview of *The Practice and Application of Oral History* by Erica Fugger (2015). I explain how each of the elements that are attributed to oral history go hand in hand with each of the freedoms.

1. **Freedom of Opportunity - A Multidisciplinary Field.** (YouTube allows oral history to be applied in a new way and field to garner new kinds of information.)

2. **Freedom of Speech - Historical Record through Spoken Word.** (YouTube feels that all creators will have the potential of finding a like-minded audience, and oral history wishes to capture the voices of individuals from a range of cultures, backgrounds and life mixes to be able to show the history of our world in all its richness.)

3. **Freedom of Information - Contextualisation of the Individual within History.** (YouTube allows the general public access to material from its creation in 2005 to now and may help us understand how we grew alongside the technology that we nurtured into existence, now affirming and nurturing our identity in return.)

4. **Freedom to Belong - Exchange of Perspectives.** (All voices are worth recording and may show others that they are not alone.)

This combination of elements, to me at least, shows the unique connection YouTube, vlogging, and oral history have with each other. The only other element I didn't include within the list set out by oral history was the element of interview technique. Perhaps there is something to be said with regard to the material one gains from interviewing an individual rather than seeing the material they generate of their own volition. But when vloggers do share so much with their audience already, such as the birth of their children, family Christmas traditions, holidays and heart break, to me this feels a fascinating oral tale to analyse with no interference from me acting as historian.

Daniel F. Chamberlain and J. Edward Chamberlin edited a work together entitled *Or Words to that Effect; Orality and the Writing of Literary History* (2016). They aimed to speak and raise questions around why spoken language histories received so little written publication and analysis.
from academics. When speaking of oral tradition storytellers and practitioners, they say that academic communities were held in ill regards by them for their lack of appreciation towards their work. Vloggers often vocalise to their audience the same feelings towards negative commenters or news articles that paint the occupation of filming and recording your life story as ‘simple’ or ‘not a real job’. As I now move into the academic community, I endeavour to try and not have preconceptions of what is worthwhile to acknowledge as history, and what is not. I am to be a tool to comment on humanity in any of its forms and expressions. Chamberlain and Chamberlin include some commentary around how Majorcan storytellers begin their tales: “aixo era y no era - “it was, and it was not.” (p.4, Chamberlain, Chamberlin) If history is always perceived through each individual, and each individual may present their personal tale in different ways depending on their life mix, then history is and is not the narrative we see in vlogs. That is the whole of the individual, but it also isn’t.

Two authors in the field of anthropology helped me understand that I was not alone in wanting to understand what it means to exist as a human in time, space and through the eyes of others alongside history. Michael Jackson, the same author of *Politics of Storytelling* I spoke of earlier, and Albert Piette both wrote works interested in the same field within a four-year span of each other, having never heard of the other. Their shared interest was in existential anthropology. The two then joined their studies and powers in a book that was published in 2015, *What is Existential Anthropology*. My copy sat amongst the other books in my set, as an acknowledgment to this moment now where you read this discussion.

We begin with the assertion that, while individually acting, thinking and feeling are always situated historically, socially, and environmentally, every person’s existence is characterised by projects, intentions, desires, and outcomes that outstrip and in some sense transform these prior conditions (p. 3).

Both Piette and Jackson believe that humans do not live in singular stable states with identities always decided upon, but as creatures of change, able to act in a multitude of ways simultaneously. They wish to describe humans as more than the parts that make them up socially, culturally biologically and so on; they wish to describe humans as they exist. Can you believe that there are individuals, vloggers, providing them and myself the data without our need to ask?

**Conclusion**

I have so many ideas and future projects based around the discoveries I’ve made throughout this Masters. It excites me to see what the next few years will bring thanks to the work I’ve
performed here. To continue in the same area of academics, I want to write a book that covers three-hundred and sixty-five days as experienced through the eyes of vloggers, exploring what history looks like when you watch a vlog a day. The vlogs would also be selected from different countries and cultures, as a way to show self-representation and national identity through video. I also want to continue filming for myself with at least one vlog a month, using my newfound knowledge to inform how I create and present things in the future. I’m hoping to incorporate more of the history of my family in the footage, and my life in a New Zealand culture.

I feel as if I have learnt a lot of my own personal history through this process. Narrative is always going to be a powerful aspect to my being and to now understand it in its modern usage is a joy. Upon completing this, I’m also going to be looking at the potential of working for Google/YouTube, to learn more of the behind-the-scenes nature of the medium, as I did when I learnt film. The front and backstage of this industry will always fascinate me as you cannot have one without the other.

With all the research and work I have done towards this, I always seem to come back to this quote from Jenna Marbles as she discusses her passion and interest in YouTube with her partner, Julien Solomita in their shared podcast, Jenna + Julien Podcast (2014). For Jenna, the platform was a means to connect with like-minded people, and experience personalities and identities she wouldn’t normally get a chance to know in her day to day life. It resonates with me, because I too have the same desire. The desire that drove me through this work, through this project and in my life.

“I just want to see people being people.”
- Jenna + Julien Podcast #134
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Appendix B. INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

Information for participants

Research Project Title: Vlogging and the Presentation of Self in Contemporary Oral History Making.
Student: Rebecca Bernard

Synopsis of project
The project seeks to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of vlogging in YouTube. It asks why and how everyday people participate in the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making through vlogs. Through interviews with vloggers as well as the creation of my own vlog channel, I hope to contribute back to the YouTube vlogging community an in-depth understanding of our motivations and methods.

What we are doing
A channel entitled 'Digital_Fireplace' has been created as a vehicle to deliver vlogs created by the researcher, and also to share personal thoughts on the journey around creating their own channel and finding their rhythm and style, as well as the building of their creation, editing and posting process. The interviews will be a space where the researcher and participant can reflect on the different nuances behind presenting oneself online to an unknown audience. All questions and conversation during the interview is to help answer the question: how can the practice of vlogging contribute to an understanding of the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making (in YouTube)?

What it will mean for you
As a participant, you will be asked to be a part of a sit down interview, to discuss their art and reason behind vlogging, in a relaxed setting that will be recorded for research purposes. At the end of the interview, I will present one of my own channel videos for discussion on technique and style, and you will be invited to select one of your own videos of your choice to complete the same process on. This whole process will last up to 1.5 hours.

The second phase of the project will be another 1.5 hours spent completing the same tasks, but having gone away considering anything that was brought up in the first phase.

Some recorded content from the interviews will be edited and published in vlog updates on my channel as a part of the research, and you may be identifiable in these vlog updates on YouTube. You will be given the opportunity to review edited content for up to two weeks before publication. Contents and findings of this research project will also be reported on in the final examination. You can, if you wish, ask to see the exegesis after it is submitted for examination.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of our schedule, any withdrawals must be done before the completion of the project. To withdraw, please contact me bekk.bernard@gmail.com or my supervisor, whose email is listed below.
Please contact us if you need more information about the project. At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor:

My supervisor is Dr. Leon Tan, phone 815-4321 ext. 7280 or email ltan@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: ####-#### (insert application number)
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participant Consent Form

Project: Vlogging and the Presentation of Self in Contemporary Oral History Making.
Student: Rebecca Bernard

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project.

I understand that this project involves two interviews which will be audio recorded (and transcribed), and that the transcriptions will be used as part of the research and final presentation for the researchers’ final examinations.

I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on password protected laptops (researcher and supervisors) for the duration of my project and for 5 years after it's completion, which follows standard practice at Unitec.

I understand that I can see the finished research document and that a summary of research findings will be provided to me after the researchers’ examination period in November. I also understand that the contents and findings of this research project will be reported on the final examination, in either the form of transcriptions or audio recording.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: …………………………………………………………………………………

Participant Signature: ....................... Date: ........................

Project Researcher: ..................... Date: ......................

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: ####-#### (insert application number)
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix D. LISTED VLOGS ON DIGITAL_FIREPLACE YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Vlog #1, Feb 13, 2019.

Well, we all have to start somewhere! I will make a separate video at some point discussing some of my Masters work, but for now it was good to get the first hurdle of posting a first video out of the way. Enjoy and give feedback! Would love to know your thoughts :)

Vlog #2, Mar 23, 2019.

This vlog covers what I got up to in the first week of March, including celebrating my birthday!

I'm learning a lot about the mechanics behind vlogging and how I react to creation through my filmmaker eyes, and vlogging consumer assumptions. It's harder than it looks! I spent a decent amount of time just struggling getting my footage from my phone to computer due to Apple and Samsung not being able to consistently communicate with each other through a cable! I don't mind the quality of my phone, but I can see why people do use cameras with removable SD cards rather than having to spend a WHOLE DAY watching your footage upload to OneDrive so you can download it for editing -_- At least this all counts as learning though!

Vlog #3, Apr 9, 2019.

Let's talk. Life is crazy. I'm going to try for consistency with this but can't promise much currently!

My editing skills are improving with iMovie, although in all honesty I hate a lot of the titling options, but I'm making do for now. I really need to figure out a better audio system. Anyone else notice the weird popping in the first filmed segment? No idea what that is! We all knew this would be a learning journey though!
Vlog #4, Apr 24, 2019.

Well! The learning just keeps coming! Vlogging so far has felt more focused on you all getting to know me and what I am about, but this video has a completely different feel to me. It's almost as if I'm at the point of assuming people have watched some of the other content so I don't need to keep explaining myself? I have begun to refer back to other videos too which is an interesting development. Are these videos all separate entities or small connections in a larger story? Any thoughts on this my lil embers?

In other news; I'm really reconsidering using my phone as a primary camera for this. The battery life was fine in Wellington, which was a big concern, but the sheer annoyance of the sound! UGH! And the fact that I cannot utilise some of the cooler features if I use the selfie mode, unlike those cameras with the flip screens. Does the sound bother you lot as much as it does me?

I also wonder how many of you noticed the lack of music in this one? I decided due to all my footage being so short and bitsy that I would try and find other ways of connecting them other than the use of musical flow. I actually use a piece of audio captured in a cafe in Wellington 3 times throughout to maintain an organic feel.

Does anyone read these?

Vlog #5, Jun 6, 2019.

.... At least I'm trying!

Thank you so much to all of my Christchurch friends that supported me through the trip/adventure :) You make life a wonderful experience.

Special thanks to Loren for taking me to the Catnap Cafe! Please head on over to their page and check them out! - https://www.catnapcafe.co.nz/

Although I seem to have solved a few of the issues with using my phone, I am intending on buying a camera and Mic now. If you have any recommendations for this please fire them through! I'm currently going through Casey Neistat's rig options and figure out the best option for my price range and content.

Releasing a video soon that will explain my masters and this channel a lot better! Stay tuned my embers!
Vlog #6, Jun 16, 2019.

A fantastic day spent in my old hunting grounds, the Matakana Markets. I used to be there a lot of weekends with my dad looking after dogs as people wandered around. So many fun memories and it was awesome bringing my partner there and seeing my dad still loving what he does! It was also nice to talk to dad about the passing of our beloved dog Stella. Rest in peace my sweet goofy girl :)

Filming this was really fun! My partner Quentin has gotten behind me with this whole vlogging business and was filming a lot on his phone for me to put into the edit. Some of the coolest shots are his doing! Also my nephew has a great eye and sat with me on his sick day helping me choose music and put this together. It definitely helped me see my work in a new light.

Music is all from https://www.epidemicsound.com as they offer a great service to help creators get access to awesome music that will never be copyrighted. I watched this video as inspiration for this move: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JcsZ...

Other than that! The masters is going well and filming for the explanation video starts this week ^_^ see ya then!

Vlog #7, Jul 7, 2019.

Welcome to me trying to see what it takes to daily vlog for a week!!!

I'm really excited and nervous to attempt this. Unlike the other vlogs, the fact of having to post it immediately adds in an extra sense of pressure that hasn't come into play so far.

I'm already learning a few things, mostly about how you may think you don't have enough footage but do, and that you may have an idea of how to use the footage, but that changes during the edit. (Look to the music appearing when Bunny does!) This video I was hoping would be up earlier, but trying to squish everything into a day can be quite hard, especially when your internet is running a bit slow for everyone in your flat.

In any case, tune in for more as this week rolls by!

Vlog #8, Jul 8, 2019.

Daily Vlog 2 of the week challenge!
I think I'm finding a rhythm with this? However, this video was shorter than I expected, even though I felt like I varied my day and footage up more! Still learning how to gauge that. Honestly, I'm just proud of myself for posting this by 8pm!!!

Definitely getting more and more annoyed at the popping sound coming out in my audio. Cannot wait to get a camera and mic! Sadly I will just have to cope for now with what I have.

Vlog #9, Jul 9, 2019.

Daily Vlog 3 of the week long challenge!

Guys, this could have been a more well rounded vlog if the world hadn't defied me! I've lost some footage to the cosmos, which makes me very sad, but oh well! I've learnt my lesson, and now we move on, and I'm not crying YOU ARE.

I'm heading up to my home town to spend time with all my family, and it's the most bizarre thing to have to check what kind of internet they all have so I can figure out how this uploading thing will go while there. Hopefully it all works out!

Vlog #10, Jul 10, 2019.

Daily Vlog 4! WE ARE OVER HALF WAY!!!

I cannot believe I have (so far) posted something every day for 4 days straight. Honestly? I know they aren't great, and they aren't my best work, but I love them any way! It's like a little diary, and the fact that I'm managing it amongst everything else in life is just mind blowing!

This particular video I had no hope for last night when I went to bed, and yet it's turned out okay! It's a quick one, but I mean.... I make the rules so MEH. And I had to get my house cleaned or I was just going to have continual anxiety about it, because that's what being an adult is.

Vlog #11, Jul 11, 2019.
Daily Vlog #5!! Crazy how quickly this week has flown by.

I nearly uploaded this without any music under the hyper-lapsed portion! Glad I caught that in time. This one was a lot of fun to edit, with my nearly 2 year old nephew trying to help, and then later my sisters input! I've even chucked in some new techniques which my sisters suggested I try out!

Overall, I'm really enjoying this process, but it is a little tiring. I'm thinking it would be worthwhile to do a proper sit down and unload my thoughts on the process itself and the pressures that come with it.

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Vlog #12, Jul 12, 2019.

So Daily Vlog #6! Who would have thought that would happen so quick in comparison to yesterdays 10:41 posting! Oops, I may have sort have posted it to the wrong channel…

In other news! Today has been an exercise in patience, as I struggled to download all my footage on my dads WIFI, and yet... it uploaded in 10 minutes???????? You should all be excited to see tomorrows vlog by the way! I've had a great day in my dads workshop!

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Vlog #13, Jul 13, 2019.

Daily Vlog #7!!! The final to a week of consecutive uploads!

Honestly just proud of myself at this point. I'm very tired and worn out from a long week. I think one of the biggest lessons learned is that, at least with my current phone, One Drive, Edit, encode, upload situation, is that you need a bunch of stamina for it! You are switching roles constantly, from film techie to presentation to post hair-puller-outer. It's a juggling act, but to be frank, I'm just seeing the value in the videos more and more. It's making my family laugh and smile, it's giving dear friends the opportunity to know me more, and it's reflecting all the parts of my life that are little diamonds in the rough. I'm enjoying this, and the data is rich!

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Vlog #14, Jul 16, 2019.
So this is a day or two late, but I ended up doing a vlog of the rest of my weekend after daily vlogging for a whole week! I had a fabulous time with my family, and it was extremely refreshing to spend that time with them again.

My next job now is to do some more in depth research into the experience of daily vlogging, and build a reflection video for that. I'll also be looking to do another couple kinds of video tests, but really, it's time to hit the books again and do the nitty gritty part of my research.

Thank you all so much for watching the daily week, it was a fun experience and you all make it worthwhile, so cheers to you!


So welcome back to more of me being much strange! My first video in too long! Apologies for that, but it is what it is. Trying to involve more discussion for my masters throughout the next coming videos as I have less then a semester to go now! GAH! But I will try to keep it all interesting ^_^

I can't believe I'm a bird mum now!!! So glad to have her first few days on video to include in this hehe.

Vlog #16, Sep 23, 2019.

Hello 8-bit embers!

Well, what do you know! Your girl finally got herself a new camera and is SO EXCITED. I've linked the model down below for those interested, but what this important change actually represents in a shift of energy in my masters degree. I've been dabbling in the vlogging world, trying to do what they all say, "Just pick up your phone and film!" and although it has been a great experience, it's now time to pull all that data and discuss it within the realm of my question.

-How can the practice of vlogging contribute to an understanding of the presentation of self in contemporary oral history making?-

After this video, the next 4 are going to destined to try and break down and answer that question, so if you are interested, stay tuned!
Vlog #17, Dec 22, 2019.

Hi all!

Welcome back to a long overdue Vlog from the Digital Fireplace! Life has been throwing me a few curveballs between uni and home life. I’m sorry if this is quite a chatty vlog but there was lots to catch up on and my main camera was dead, woops. Special shout outs to my mates Miahi and Ella. You two were great helps for me through some rough weeks and I really appreciate you both.

Also shout out to my boss from @VerboomTees on Instagram, and for the art work that @ameliabernardruizart and @modern.bard had put in my old office.

As always, a big thank you to my amazing boyfriend for your love and support through it all. xox