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Book Review

Title of the Book: *Thanks for Watching: An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on YouTube*

Author: Patricia G. Lange

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Pages: 352

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Since its inception, YouTube has become increasingly popular as a video-sharing platform catering to community and commercial needs. The website has grown to mean so many things to people. Users spend a significant portion of their daily life on the platform, viewing and interacting through videos. Patricia G. Lange's *Thanks for Watching* deviates from the idea of YouTube as just a video-consuming and sharing platform and focuses on its role in social and community formations in the US since it was established in 2006. The book analyses "vernacular" videos (videos made by amateurs rather than professional videographers) and personal vlogs on the platform that embody characteristics of self-reflection, subtlety, and everydayness. Lange argues that this makes it a democratic space for self-expression and interaction for these YouTubers. The book argues that these insightful, compelling videos have always been foundational to the growth of YouTube but get drowned in the noise of virality and monetisation. The book thus offers an alternative narrative to the dominant discourse of capitalism and commercialisation surrounding YouTube's popularity in the US.

Thanks for Watching has eight chapters and an interdisciplinary approach through media studies and visual anthropology. Each chapter mirrors a Lefebvrian rhythmic stage from birth to

death and rebirth, which, Lange argues, marks the interactive dynamics of participation on YouTube. Henri Lefebvre theorises that life interacts with places and time through rhythms that mark birth, growth, peak, decline and end. Lange uses this framework of rhythm analysis to frame the participation of YouTubers since their arrival on the platform.

The introductory chapter lays out the broad framework of the research project. It begins by outlining the embeddedness of YouTube in the US. It sets out the goals of the book and the research methods that have contributed to it. This chapter sets the tone and offers an overview of the structure of the book, the methodologies used, and a brief look at the scholarly approaches that help frame the work.

Chapter 2, “YouTube Initiation: Participating through a Camera”, studies the various modes of user entry into YouTube. It reflects the Lefebvrian stage of ‘birth’. The chapter looks at the different modes and degrees of participation that govern video-sharing cultures, both on and off YouTube. Two ideas that are elaborately discussed are the issues with existing discourses on “participation” and “narcissism”. The chapter ethnographically analyses the various participatory trajectories contributing to the site's development.

Chapter 3, “Growing Closer: Sharing Time and Space”, studies the growth phase of participation on YouTube. The growth of participation is analysed through an in-depth study of meet-ups and offline gatherings of YouTubers and argues about the connectedness between place and mediation. The chapter introduces new theoretical concepts that can form the rubric of digital media research. Key concepts that are worked out through the course of the chapter include “emplacement”, “chronotype”, and “community”. These analytical concepts also bring to attention the question of regional influences on YouTube which are essential in studying geographical variation and cultures of the platform. It underlines the need to look at the influence of place despite the global interconnectedness of digital media.

Chapter 4, “Syncing up through Reciprocity”, analyses the ways in which social participation is intensified in the Lefebvrian growth phase. It studies forms and degrees of reciprocity that function on and off the platform and intensifies social relations. The chapter carries forward the discussion of “attention” and “narcissism” from Chapter 2. Tying up the discourse of attention, this chapter presents interpersonal forms of reciprocation, such as “likes” and

“comments”, as fundamental aspects of a mediated environment. The centrality of the notion and practice of reciprocation to the project lies in the title of the book, “Thanks for Watching”, which is a commonly used gesture made by the YouTuber in response to the viewing of a video.

Chapter 5, “What Defines a Community”, discusses the prospects of community formation through sociality on YouTube. The title of the chapter is also a reference to a video compilation of recorded interviews that Lange, as a participant researcher, had created and posted on YouTube. The chapter mirrors the peak of the Lefebvrian rhythmic cycle. Just like the previous chapter problematises studying reciprocity without due attention to temporal and spatial influences, this chapter presses the need to look at community formation as a process that is linear and cyclical rather than a categorical notion.

Chapter 6, “Portals to the Posthuman”, reflects the Lefebvrian stage of decline in participation. It looks at the various reasons for the decline in participation, such as changes within the platform, digital migration, and death. Driving this chapter is the broad question of how humanity is being influenced by technical acts such as video creation. The chapter relies on notions of the “posthuman” as “a collective or hive that contains the disparate thoughts of many, such that individual identities become collectively incorporated” (186). YouTube is seen as a collective that accepts multiple voices that move beyond individual subjectivities onto a collective realm.

Chapter 7, “Living with Arrhythmia: Prospects for Renewal”, looks at the possibility of a revival or rebirth of active use of the platform. The chapter looks at features of renewal that are meaningful to YouTubers. It does so by looking at the impact of monetisation on socially-oriented YouTubers. Using ethnographic evidence, the project denies the equalising of monetisation and the end of sociality even as it looks at the impact of the site’s commercial choices on the perception of the site as a social space. Crucial events of YouTube’s corporate trajectory, such as partnership and policy changes, monetisation, and the rise of multichannel networks (MCN), are analysed to study the impact of these changes on veteran YouTubers and new video makers.

In the concluding chapter, Lange summarises the purpose and findings of the research on YouTube as a new media site. This research aims to give YouTube sociality the attention it deserves so that it does not get overshadowed under popular discourses of monetisation. The book emphasises that preserving alternative histories is a strong tool to challenge singular narratives.

Thus, the concluding section proposes a framework for future research in video-sharing cultures, bringing diverse usage analysis of media sites into the knowledge system.

Thanks for Watching is successful in its attempt to motivate a “history of the future” for socially supportive platforms similar to YouTube. It is able to bring to the forefront an aspect of YouTube that is not evident in its popular discourse. It thus becomes a crucial text for scholars interested in thinking about the localised interactions of global media cultures. The book leaves the reader with a need to critically evaluate overgeneralised understandings of digital media and focus on its particularities. Overall, the book presents a well-rounded argument for its claim of sociality on YouTube and its presentation of YouTube as a state of mind for socially-oriented YouTubers in the US.