

# Genre Analysis of the YouTube Video Essay

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2024

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet**

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# GENRE ANALYSIS OF THE YOUTUBE VIDEO ESSAY

Žanrovska analiza video-eseja na YouTubeu

Sveučilište u Rijeci  
Filozofski fakultet  
Završni rad  
Rijeka, 2024.

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI  
FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

# Genre Analysis of the YouTube Video Essay

Završni rad

Studij: Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij *Engleski jezik i književnost i Povijest umjetnosti* (dvopredmetni)

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Rijeka, 2024.

**UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
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# Genre Analysis of the YouTube Video Essay

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Art History at the University of Rijeka

**Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Martina Podboj, PhD**

**September 2024**

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U Rijeci 10.9.2024.

(datum i godina)

F. Ivić

(vlastoručni potpis)

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# Abstract

This thesis focuses on the YouTube video essay from the perspective of genre analysis. The aim is to investigate recurring motifs and move sequences along with ways in which creators interact with their audience throughout these videos. By looking into these it will also seek to identify the values and goals present within this discourse community, and the possible origins of these features. In order to achieve this, this thesis will adopt the tenets presented by Swales (1987), Jones (2019) and Marwick and boyd (2010). To achieve this aim three representative video essays from 2024 were selected to be analyzed, made by three separate creators: *the downfall of streaming* (by Mina Le), *Patriarchy according to the Barbie movie* (by Pop Culture Detective) and *should we ban social media?* (by Alice Cappelle). The analysis showed that the video essay genre has a consistent move structure. The videos are often divided into at least three sections, each with its own set of corresponding moves. These, however, can be adapted to suit the needs of expert users. Due to the affordances of the YouTube platform, the video essay itself is accompanied by a title, thumbnail and video description, and interaction through comments, (dis)liking, and sharing enables communication between members of the discourse community around the genre. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated the goals and values of the community to be those of authenticity and transparency, with an emphasis on education and critical thinking. They are achieved through verbal cues, use of multimodality, and the ways in which creators present their sources.

Key words: genre; genre analysis; YouTube video essay

# 1. Introduction

This thesis will look into the genre of YouTube video essays from the perspective of genre analysis. By comparing and contrasting the three chosen examples of YouTube video essays, within the framework of genre analysis as described by Jones (2019), it will seek to affirm some of its key features.

The video essay is a genre that has emerged relatively recently, alongside the growth and development of social media platforms and digital technology. Despite its brief existence, it has managed to establish itself quite firmly as a genre with its own distinct hallmarks and discourse community.

Since YouTube video essays are created, distributed and engaged with in the online context they have the potential of reaching and impacting a wide audience. The genre of video essay serves to allow the creators behind them to voice their opinions, concerns and ideas to the community. Which is then encouraged to engage with them further. This engagement can go on to take a variety of forms be it in the video's comment section, a response video or even be taken over to another social media platform entirely.

These messages are constructed according to the affordances of YouTube's platform, which alongside the video itself contains the video's title, thumbnail and video description, but also the ability to engage with the video through comments, (dis)likes and sharing the video. The videos themselves are structurally consistent and clearly separated into at least three sections. This thesis argues that that is in part due to the influence of the traditional written essay and its strict writing conventions. The YouTube video essay, however, adds on to that influence through the usage of various multimodal tools and frequent shift in the creators register, shifting between a formal and casual tone with ease.

The thesis is divided into five separate sections, including this Introduction. In the second chapter (*Genre and genre analysis*) key concepts from the field of discourse analysis and its approach of genre analysis are presented. The third chapter (*Analysis*) is the largest one and is divided into four main subsections, focusing on the methodology, and the three main segments of the analysis: the communicative purpose of the genre (together with its move structure, constraints and affordances), the discourse community surrounding the genre, and the interdiscursive and intertextual influence of the genre of the written essay. The thesis ends with a conclusion and list of references and sources.



## 2. Genre and genre analysis

Genre is a technical term used across different fields within humanities, generally referring to some kind of a culturally recognized text-type. For discourse analysis, broadly speaking genre refers to “recognizable categories of discourse used to carry out certain actions” which, as socially recognized forms “play an important role in understanding discourse” (Tardy, 2021 p. 51). Due to their repeated use, genres are recognizable by members of communities that use them, such as academic researchers reporting research findings, politicians delivering speeches during election campaigns, etc. Because of the variety of contexts in which humans communicate, genre’s embody expectations for specific communities, not just when it comes to linguistic form, but also rhetorical strategies, procedural practices, and content, among other dimensions (ibid).

Genre analysis is an umbrella term referring to an approach or a set of analytic methods that aims to describe features of these socially recognized forms and actions and to build an understanding of the relationship between language and context (Tardy, 2021 pp. 51-52). According to Jones (2019, p. 8) the field of genre analysis within discourse analysis deals with the “study of the social functions of different kinds of texts”. Jones goes on explain that genres are not merely types of texts, but instead communicative events characterized by the constraints and affordances of the media through which they are expressed. These events have participants, users who can recognize them and categorize them. Genres are therefore forms, which have become “typified” through frequent usage to “respond to a specific need or exigance” (Tardy, 2021, p. 51). The form of the genre therefore conforms to its intended usage and audience. As such, Tardy states, genres “embody a community’s expectations for not just linguistic form, but also rhetorical strategies, procedural practices, and subject-matter or content, among other dimensions” (2021, p. 51). Tardy also points out that genres are not isolated phenomena, but instead inherently intertextual, and as such they also often employ a variety of modes.

This definition deviates quite a bit from the more common understanding of the concept of genre. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2004) provides the following definitions of genre:

*a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content*  
and

*painting that depicts scenes or events from everyday life usually realistically.*

However, below that there is a brief explanation of the word's origin and its relation to the Latin word *genus*: "Both words contain the *gen-* root because they indicate that everything in a particular category (a genre or a genus) belongs to the same "family" and thus has the same origins." (ibid.). This shows that the connection between the genre as relating to art and genre as relating to discourse analysis both refer to some kinds of categories. The difference being that the former refers to a variety of things linked through a common denominator, while the latter refers to specific linguistic events which follow a set format.

However, the YouTube video essay genre blurs these lines quite a bit. According to DeGuzman (2024) a YouTube video essay can be defined as a "video that analyzes a specific topic, theme, person or thesis. ... essays in video form that aim to persuade, educate, or critique."

YouTube was first registered in 2005 (Britannica), which means it has been around for almost 20 years, which is a relatively short while in comparison to movies and TV programs. According to Williams' article (2021), in 2010 the website was purchased by Google, who in 2012 began favoring long-form content in their algorithm due to the potential for more ad revenue, leading to longer videos with higher production values. The video essay fit into this new framework quite well. It combines formal or even academic topics with the art of editing, acting, sound design and/or animation.

Therefore, from the perspective of discourse analysis, the video essay clearly confirms the criteria of multimodality of genres. YouTube video essays are also highly intertextual, including a variety of sources and quotes to advance their arguments. While ten years might seem like a short time to fully consolidate a genre, it is enough time for the formation of noticeable patterns, especially since the video essay relates directly to the written essay and since its development and consumption exists in the space of fast-evolving digital and communication technologies. From the written essay, the video essay borrows the three-part structure of the introduction, main part and conclusion, where the main part is the "heart" of the video. On the other hand, the video essay will often include a section dedicated to greeting, as well as saying goodbye, to the viewer. The video creators will also often encourage the viewer to visit their other social media or the website of their sponsor. The viewer will also be encouraged to engage with the functions offered by YouTube (liking the video, subscribing to the creator). Notably the viewer will also be encouraged to participate in the comment section, thus expanding the discussion outside of the video and participating in the community gathered around it. This community fits well into the notion of the genre's *discourse community* (Swales 1987).

Swales (1987, p. 1) describes the defining characteristics of a discourse community. Firstly, they include a shared goal which the use of a certain genre may help them achieve. Secondly, the members must have a means through which they communicate, tying it to his third point, which is that members must have a way to provide each other “information and feedback”. This shows that the community is not necessarily tied to one genre but may use a variety depending on what it needs. Swales’ fourth characteristic of discourse communities “is the development of genre-specific discursal expectations”. The fifth characteristic states that the community should have an “increasingly shared and specialized terminology”, which can be presumed to naturally arise among a “critical mass of members” who are well versed in relevant “discursal and content expertise”, making this the sixth characteristic.

Jones (2019, p. 10) elaborates on Swales’ concept of discourse community by stating that within these communities there are “novices” who are “shown the ropes” of the community by the “expert” members. The novices are attracted through the genres which serve also to socialize new members “into the ways of acting and thinking associated with the community.” (ibid: p. 54). To the members of the group, as Jones concludes, the genres are tools through which they not only further the goals of the community but also “validates [he or she] these goals as worthy and legitimate and shows him or herself to be a worthy and legitimate member of the group”. To do this they must be aware of the constraints/affordances which accompany the move structure of the genre used by it. What qualifies expert users is the ability of “exploiting these constraints in creative and unexpected ways” (Jones, 2019, p. 8). In the context of the YouTube video essay, the community can be divided into the creators and the audience. The audience engages with the content the creator posts and amongst each other by participating in the comment section. On the other hand, in order to prove that they are expert members, creators need to prove they understand both the way in which the video needs to be structured as well as which values it needs to promote. A common value, for example, is transparency, shown by including a list of sources and clearly separating the creators’ own opinion from fact.

In genre analysis the “building blocks” which create a genre are referred to as *moves* (Jones, 2019, p. 49). Within each genre it is understood amongst its users which of the many available building blocks must be used and in which order. This is, however, dictated not only by the members but also by the constraints of certain mediums which dictate the structure of a given communicative event (Jones, 2019, p. 9). This structure, series of moves or standardized sequence of elements, is referred to in genre analysis as the *move structure* (ibid.).

Expert users are members capable of rearranging the move sequence within the genre structure, while maintaining its purpose (Jones, 2019, p. 10). Along with these moves there are other elements which may persist amongst various exemplars of a genre; a common goal, communication among members (often with specific jargon), various styles of filming/writing/editing, as well as various forms of media or modes. Depending on the genre it can also be linked to a specific platform or application. For example, for video essays posted on YouTube the platform and its built-in features become a part of what defines the genre, the terminology used and the kinds of media it can support or even the various genres which naturally coexist with the video essay genre (Jones, 2019, p. 52).

Genres are often interlinked, through *chains* – one work triggering the creation of another. For example, a YouTube video, followed by comments, followed by tweets followed by a TikTok video. Another, less linear kind of interaction between genres is the *genre network* (ibid: 48). The key difference between the two is that the genres involved in genre networks are linked intertextually, whereas those in genre chains are not. Intertextuality is defined as the “connections formed between a text and other texts.” (Jones, 2019, p. 48). Intertextuality primarily helps link together different genres through direct quotes, paraphrasing or presuppositions. Presuppositions are relevant in the context of the discourse community because they serve in establishing bonds around, what is assumed to be, shared knowledge.

This is highly notable in online discourses, since online platforms enable easier and more creative ways to intertextually link genres through technology. Jones (2019, p 49). points out the example of an X (formerly Twitter) user who combines two hashtags on her posts, “#savage” and “#FirstWorldProblems”. Jones uses this as an example of both intertextuality; linking one post to all the others that share these hashtags, and interdiscursivity, as the users link a personal impression with a greater social issue.

Lastly, and most broadly, a multitude of genres may form a genre ecology “in which texts that are not directly linked to one another in chains or networks can nevertheless affect one another...” (Jones, 2019, p. 104). These relationships are not static, and neither are the genres themselves. They evolve, change, merge or disappear depending on the needs of the community which they belong to (ibid.).

This tendency of genres to adapt and evolve around their communities has perhaps become most obvious through the modern use of the internet. This is in part due to the concept known as “context collapse”, which occurs when multiple audiences are flattened into one (Marwick

and boyd, 2011, p. 121). This means that every person posting on the internet may have an intended audience, however they have no guarantee that their text will reach it or that they will be the only people to see it. Furthermore, while there is a feature which allows for private conversations on most social media platforms, most interactions among users happen publicly, as is the case with the users of X (or then Twitter), which Marwick and boyd (2011) looked into.

Namely, according to Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 115) “every participant in a communicative act has an imagined audience”. Since social media is so interconnected, with content migrating freely from the original site/app to many others, regardless of the creator’s intent it becomes impossible for one person to consider every potential audience member that may view their content online. To combat this, social media users resort to constructing an imagined audience based on the feedback they receive from their content in order to create a strategy for the way in which they present themselves to their real audience (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 115). This imagined audience impacts the creators’ “goals, vocabulary, technique and subject matter” (ibid. 4), therefore in some cases the creators construct a persona in relation to this imagined audience. According to Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 122) among Twitter users this leads to “strategically concealing information, targeting tweets to different audiences and attempting to portray both an authentic self and an interesting personality”.

When it comes to the video essay as a genre, creators may pay attention to the use of discourse markers, i.e., “words and phrases that often rather explicitly mark the end of one activity and the beginning of another.” (Jones 2019, p. 71). Since video essays are a genre belonging to long-form content, creators may shift between various registers topics in one video each associated with a specific set of discourse markers. Jones (2019, p. 72) also identifies contextualization cues which are non-verbal and can be expressed through changes in “the pitch, speed, rhythm or intonation of our voices” as well as shifts in body language or facial expressions (ibid.). These, as Jones (2019, p. 72) emphasizes, do not contain meaning in and of themselves but instead “...activate culturally coded assumptions about context, interactional goals and interpersonal relationships...”.

Maintaining the construct of “authenticity” in online communication such as on social media requires, as Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 124) write, self-censorship and balance. Self-censorship in this context refers to how some users of Twitter, for example, won’t even mention certain topics (be it because they are too personal or too controversial) on their pages, because they believe they will be negatively perceived by their imagined audience. This indicates

another facet of the imagined audience, which is that its most “sensitive members” are often put at its forefront (ibid, p. 125). These members, which may include bosses, family members, partners etc., Marwick and boyd refer to as “nightmare readers” (ibid. p. 125). The balance refers to the balancing of personal and professional information – in many cases by sometimes interjecting small pieces of personal information into a larger professional “stream” of content (ibid. p. 126). These pieces of personal information are meant to provide a more “authentic” contrast to a the “impersonality” or professional content, despite this the information the users give out is often strategically chosen so as to “reinforce relationships with followers” (ibid, p. 127). What makes this tactical “authenticity” a double-edged sword is the fact that self-promotion of this kind is often seen as “inauthentic” and consequently seen as a bad thing by most users (ibid. p. 127).

This notion of a “spectating audience” is in some ways enforced through Twitter’s (and many other social media platforms with a similar model) affordances regarding its “friendship” model, which is directed by users choosing who to follow, with rarely any “expectation of reciprocity”. This creates a certain “disconnect between followers and followed” (Marwick and boyd 2011, p. 116 – 117).

The audience itself, as mentioned, interacts with the creator by engaging with their content and providing feedback. However, they also interact amongst each other. Marwick and boyd, (2011, p. 129) discuss, amongst others, the networked audience which “consists of real and potential viewers for digital content that exist within a larger social graph”. As the name implies, the members of this audience are networked – interconnected, instead of being linked exclusively to the creator of the content they consume. This type of audience is “both potentially public and personal” because, while they may not know each other personally its members presume a kind of “personal authenticity and connection” (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 129). This is in part due to their ability to communicate with each other and take turns creating a variety of content to, for and by other users separately from creator that brought them together (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p. 129).

The general idea of what Marwick and boyd note for audience and user behavior on Twitter can also be said for other social media platforms, including YouTube, which is why their approach be useful for the application of genre analysis of YouTube video essays.

## 3. Analysis

### 3.1. Data and methodology

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the genre of YouTube video essays, following the theoretical tenets of discourse analysis presented by Swales (1987), Jones (2019) and Marwick and boyd (2010). To illustrate the features that make YouTube video essays a genre on its own and to explain genre moves and the characteristics of the community of practice involved in the creation and consumption of these videos, three representative video essays were selected. The videos chosen, made by various prominent creators, will be analyzed for communicative purposes, constraints, affordances and move structures.

The following videos were selected as representative examples of video essays on YouTube: *the downfall of streaming* (by Mina Le), *Patriarchy according to the Barbie movie* (by Pop Culture Detective) and *should we ban social media?* (by Alice Cappelle). These videos were chosen because they were published in the time span of six months during the writing of this thesis, making them recent enough to reflect current trends and tendencies of the community. The videos' length was also taken into account, making it so that none of them last over an hour so as to provide a manageable amount of data.

Judging by the amounts of views it can also be established that the community engages with them actively. Namely, Cappelle's video, posted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2024, has 114,500 views just a month later, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 2024. Detective and Le on the other hand both posted their videos in May and in September 2024. At the moment of writing this, Detective's already has 512,998 views, while Le's is coming in at 640,884 views.

These videos were also chosen because their creators are prominent members within the discourse community surrounding the genre. Detective and Le both have over a million subscribers, while Cappelle has 398,000 subscribers, which is still a significant number of followers. All three authors frequently post new content and engage with the community. According to the information on their YouTube channels – Cappelle and Le both created their channels in 2020, and have posted 97 and 122 videos since then, respectively. Detective is less active, with 74 videos on his account, despite it saying that he joined in 2008. Despite this, plenty of his videos have gained millions of views since being posted (for example, *The Ethics of Looking And The "Harmless" Peeping Tom*, posted in 2022 has 1,934,655 views at the time of writing this), maintaining his relevance within the community.

The analysis will be divided into three main sections. The first one will address the formal aspects and features of the genre, and the second will aim to analyze the ways in which the chosen creators interact with their community. These two will be further divided into three subsections – the thumbnail, the video description, and the video itself. This is to mimic the way a member of the discourse community would engage with the content on the website itself. The third section will aim to compare the video essay with its predecessor; the traditional written essay.

## 3.2 Communicative purpose of the genre, its move structure, constraints and affordances

### 3.2.a The Thumbnail

When posting a video on YouTube, creators have to abide by the constraints and affordances of that platform. These will dictate the “surroundings” of the video posted if not the video itself. For instance, when browsing YouTube’s search results the thumbnails for videos will appear on the left one below the other with some relevant data on their right. This data usually contains the creator’s username, whether they are verified, and a small icon with their profile picture. What follows is the approximate time the video was posted and the number of views it has received since then and a snippet from the description below the video. YouTube also places tags below this snippet which can indicate that the video has subtitles or that the video is new. The thumbnail also contains a tag with the duration of the video. It should be noted that the thumbnail allows a very rich multimodal intertextual organization of different elements of the video essay in one still image, which aims to “capture” the entire video but also to frame it in a certain way to intrigue potential viewers in order to watch it.

Because of it being significantly more prominent to the viewer than the information next to it, creators will often try and fit certain information about the video into the thumbnail itself. For example, the thumbnail of creator Alice Capelle’s video essay *should we ban social media?* (Example 1) shows the title echoed in the white text, centered in the middle of the thumbnail which reads “social media” and is crossed out with a red line. Her profile picture and username are echoed in a picture of her in the middle of the thumbnail looking straight at the viewer with a sarcastic expression. The images of children, politicians and protestors on either side serve to indicate the topics the video is planning to cover. Because of the stark contrast of the images



used in the thumbnail and the serious expression of the creator, and the crossed-out title the viewer may already discern that the purpose may be to disparage social media.

### Example 1: Thumbnail of Alice Cappelle's *should we ban social media?*



should we ban social media?  
114 tis. pregleda · prije 1 mjesec  
Alice Cappelle  
SOURCES/RESSOURCES Sources can be found throughout the video! SOCIALS (pls don't ban them) Storygraph: ...  
Titlovi

Quite similar is the video essay posted by creator Mina Le titled *the downfall of streaming*. In the thumbnail (Example 2) she is also pictured in the center with the creators of the Watcher YouTube channel on her right and a poster for the show *The Rings of Power* on her right. There are also what appear to be article headlines quoting: *Quentin Tarantino blasts streaming movies: "It's almost like they don't exist"* and *The Rings of Power's Massive Budget Is The Show's Own Worst Enemy*. On the bottom of the thumbnail, going from left to right, there is the logo for the website Patreon, the phrase subscription fatigue and a screenshot with the words *This image or video has been moved and deleted*. The negative connotations convey which tone the video will likely have.

### Example 2: Thumbnail of Mina Le's *the downfall of streaming*



the downfall of streaming  
640 tis. pregleda · prije 3 mjeseca  
Mina Le  
► PRODUCTION written by Mina Le edited by Charlee Reiff ► SOCIALS Instagram: <http://instagram.com/gremlita> TikTok: ...  
4K Titlovi  
Broj poglavlja: 7 Intro | watcher entertainment discourse | the streaming economy | movies and tv are worse | we...

Standing out a bit from the previous two is the video essay *Patriarchy according to the Barbie movie*, posted by the Pop Culture Detective. In this case the thumbnail (Example 3) consists of only two elements: an image and two lines of text. The image is a still from the movie *Barbie* featuring a group of male characters – Kens. The text takes up the bottom half of the thumbnail, formatted in white and all capitals. The word patriarchy takes up the entire first line of text and is written in bold, giving it the most importance, while the phrase “according to Barbie” is below it, almost like a subtitle. The “the” from the video’s title is omitted from the thumbnail.

Here the communicative purpose can be said to be critiquing certain concepts from the said movie.

**Example 3: Thumbnail of Pop Culture Detective's *Patriarchy According to The Barbie Movie***



Patriarchy According to The Barbie Movie  
513 tis. pregleda · prije 3 mjeseca  
Pop Culture Detective ✓  
This video essay uses the Barbie Movie as a primer to help explain what patriarchy actually is, what it isn't, and how it ends up ...

### 3.1.b Icons and the video description

Once the video starts playing there is a variety of new elements introduced. But before looking at the video itself one can observe the icons below the video as well as the video's description. The video description being an accompanying text written mostly by the creator and separated from the white background of the website in a light gray square. Both may be considered as affordances of YouTube's platform.

The icons below the video, going from left to right, contain the profile picture and the username of the creator. Next to the usernames of all three mentioned creators is a checkmark, which indicates that they are verified users. Below their usernames is the number of their subscribers; (Alice Cappelle: 387 thousand, Mina Le: 1,55 million, The Pop Culture Detective: 1,08 million). Next is the subscription button, with the word "subscribe". Once the user clicks it, the button turns from black to white with a little animation and a bell appears, indicating that the new subscriber can choose to be notified of future uploads on the channel. This way the website encourages its users to subscribe and engage with future content made by the same creator. The last three icons are a like and dislike button, however, only the number of likes can be seen (Alice Cappelle: 5,2 thousand, Mina Le: 30 thousand, The Pop Culture Detective: 45 thousand), this perhaps encourages a more positive perception of the video, or even motivates people to press the like button over the dislike button, or to evaluate whether the video is worth watching (the general assumption being that of it has many views, it should). The next button is the share button followed by an icon of three dots which contain the functions: download, clip, save or

report. This positioning suggests that the last four functions are presented as less relevant by the website than the actions of subscribing or liking the video.

The videos' description is where the creators' personal touches become more obvious and relevant. However, there are still some noticeable patterns. It is then also worth pointing out that this section is "collapsible", meaning that the viewer can hide most of it from sight, or have it not shown by the website. This might indicate that YouTube places greater importance on data which showcases engagement rather than what the video is about. Especially since placed at the top of the description box, visible even when the rest is hidden, is the number of views and when the video was posted. In the case of Alice Cappelle's video (Example 4), on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2024, it reads as over 77 thousand views followed by the date: 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2024 (in the collapsed version the date is replaced with "5 days ago"). The relevance of this lies in the fact that by prioritizing this kind of information the platform conveys a certain set of values to its creators and their viewers, which may affect the way creators format their content (to attract engagement) and the way viewers engage with it (placing more value onto content with higher engagement).

#### Example 4: engagement section of Cappelle's video

The screenshot shows the engagement section of a YouTube video titled "should we ban social media?" by Alice Cappelle. The video has 7.2 thousand likes, 114 thousand views, and was posted 1 month ago. The description includes a promotional link for Squarespace. The engagement bar shows 864 comments and a sorting option "Poredaj po". A menu is open on the right with options: "Isječak", "Spremi", and "Prijavi".

#### Example 5: engagement section of Detective's video

The screenshot shows the engagement section of a YouTube video titled "Patriarchy According to The Barbie Movie" by Pop Culture Detective. The video has 46 thousand likes, 512 thousand views, and was posted 3 months ago. The description is a video essay about patriarchy. The engagement bar shows 2,630 comments and a sorting option "Poredaj po". A menu is open on the right with options: "Hvala", "Isječak", "Spremi", and "Prijavi".

## Example 6: engagement section of Le's video

The screenshot shows the engagement section of a YouTube video titled "the downfall of streaming" by Mina Le. The video has 31 thousand likes and 1.56 million subscribers. The description includes a promotional message for ThredUp, a link to a discount code (MINA), and a note that the video is sponsored by ThredUp. The engagement section shows 2,426 comments and a sorting option for "Poredaj po". A dropdown menu is open, showing options like "Hvala", "Isječak", "Spremi", and "Prijavi".

After opening the description of both Alice Cappelle's (Example 7) video and Mina Le's (Examples 6, 10 and 11), the first section is dedicated to the sponsor of the video. In the case of the Detective (Examples 8 and 9 below) the first section is dedicated to a summary of the video's topic. The second section self-promotional in all three cases. Cappelle and Detective promote their Patreon accounts, with Detective including a Paypal link, while Mina Le her online Newsletter. Both Cappelle and Le include references to their other social media and credit their editors, however Cappelle does it after and Le before the section dedicated to their sources. This could be because while Cappelle states that the "Sources can be found throughout the video!", Le includes a list of 25 sources, most of which are links to various other websites. The Detective on the other hand, also writes out references, however without including links. He differs from the other two creators by also offering a link to his viewers to a website on which they can help translate his video into other languages and a note about a text transcript being in the works. Lastly, while he does not link any social media accounts in the description itself, he does encourage his viewers to share his content by writing "If you'd like to participate in constructive online conversations about this video, please share it on your social media networks." The tenth section again contains the creator's profile picture, username, and number of subscribers. It also has links to other videos, information about the creators' channels and embedded links to various social media. Of the three Mina Le is the only one that employs the "chapters" function offered by YouTube, which allows her clearly to separate her video into sections or chapters as it were. It allows her viewers to easily navigate between the videos sections by clicking on the ones they choose as well allowing her to name the individual chapters for easier navigation. This section is placed right before the transcript button offered by YouTube.

The values presented here may be of transparency regarding sources and of interdiscursivity through encouraging viewers to engage with the creator on other platforms. Furthermore, it outlines other possible purposes of the genre – again promoting the creators other social media

platforms. Other purposes presented may be the purpose of promoting sponsors or their Patreon, through which the creators get paid.

### Example 7: Alice Cappelle video description

114.500 pregleda 1. kol 2024.

Go to <https://www.squarespace.com/alicecapp...> to save 10% off your first purchase of a website or domain and use the code ALICECAPPELLE!

You can support the channel on Patreon and you'll get to join our discord chat and livestreams + you will have access to bonus videos  
/alicecappelle

SOURCES/RESSOURCES

Sources can be found throughout the video!


SOCIALS (pls don't ban them)  
Storygraph: @alicecappelle  
Instagram: @alicecappelle\_  
Twitter: @cappelle\_alice  
Enquines: alice.cappelleyt@gmail.com

Video edited by Eifo Editing

#### Prijepis

Pratite pomoću prijepisa.

[Prikaz prijepisa](#)

 **Alice Cappelle**  
398 tisuća pretplatnika

[Videozapisi](#) [O kanalu](#) [Patreon](#) [Instagram](#)

[Prikaži manje](#)

### Example 8: Pop Culture Detective video description part 1

512.998 pregleda 10. svi 2024.  
This video essay uses the Barbie Movie as a primer to help explain what patriarchy actually is, what it isn't, and how it ends up harming everyone, including men.

PATREON  
/popdetective

PAYPAL  
<https://www.paypal.me/popdetective>

REFERENCES

- The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy by Allan G Johnson
- The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love by bell hooks
- Masculinities by R. W. Connell

VIDEOS

- Longer supercut of conservatives freaking out  
/behind-scenes-95631754
- Longer supercut of fictional characters saying the word patriarchy  
/another-behind-97665659
- Supercut of fictional male characters saying the word patriarchy  
/behind-scenes-3-99506234
- Julia Fox Takes A lie Detector Test  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/video/watc...>

SUBTITLES

- Help translate this video over on Amara  
<https://amara.org/videos/H0ivWPZJuDKv...>



to show a short series of clips after which another title card, this one displaying the video’s title in white capital letters against a black background. After the title card there is a promotion for the sponsor of the video ThredUp with the creator dressed up in various outfits. Alice Cappelle on the other hand places the promotional content for her sponsor Squarespace, at the end of the video but in both cases, it is made sure that the sponsored content will not interrupt their “actual” content. Le also goes on to explain her motivation to make her video and a brief explanation of the video’s structure. In Le’s case the introduction lasts until 5:23. Detective’s introduction is between the two, lasting until the 2:52 mark. He once again offers an introduction to the topic, his motivation for making the video and the way the video essay will be structured. These three elements seem to be what makes up the introduction, but all three creators do them slightly differently, which perhaps showcases them as expert users – since they understand which elements are necessary but make sure to adapt them to their individual style.

Cappelle and Le also include footage of themselves looking at the camera in the introduction as well as throughout the video. Centering themselves in the middle of the screen and from the waist up. They both have microphones, Cappelle (Example 12) places hers on a stand in front of her, while Le holds hers. Le’s (Example 13) background is significantly darker than Cappelle but she stands out dressed in white, while Cappelle stands out against her white wall and bookshelf, an element also present in Le’s background. Detective, on the other hand, does not show his face to the audience until the final portion of the video.

**Example 12: Cappelle’s footage of herself**



### Example 13: Le's footage of herself



The main part of the video is divided into sections. In all three video essays these are clearly divided though title cards and take up around the same amount of time. All three creators employ multimodality throughout their videos, however they do it into varying degrees, with varying types and not necessarily to convey the same meaning. Firstly, both Cappelle and Le have white text appear on screen next to their faces when they are on screen. Cappelle, however uses it to highlight keywords, relevant phrases, or relevant pieces of quotes. For example, at 8:53 she contrasts the terms “fairy tale” and “real” by placing them on opposite sides of the screen around her eye level (Example 14). When she uses the text for comedic effect, she signals the change by using comic sans, a very informal font (for example, when she quotes her mother saying, “corporate TV was meant to numb our brains and sell us junk food”, at 3:05) as shown in Example 15 below.

### Example 14: text appearing on screen next to Cappelle



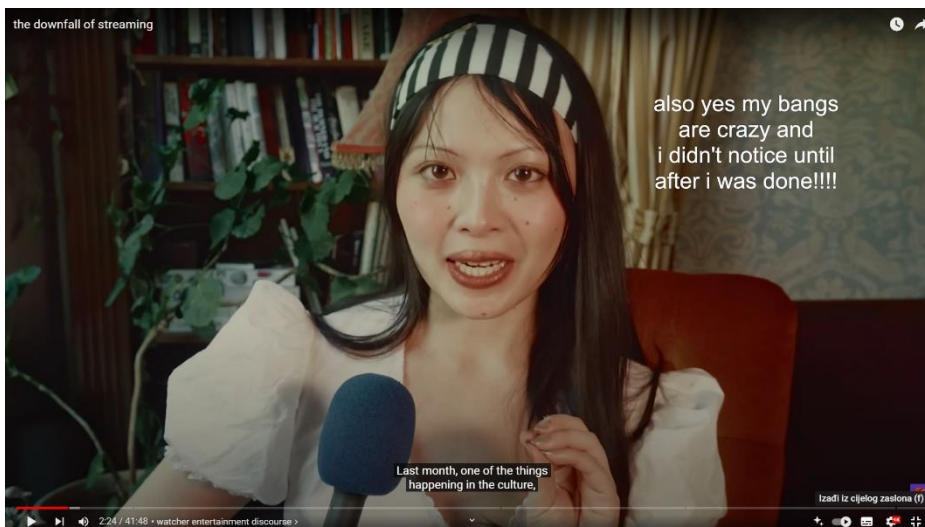


**Example 15: text appearing on screen in Cappelle’s video, formatted for comedic effect**

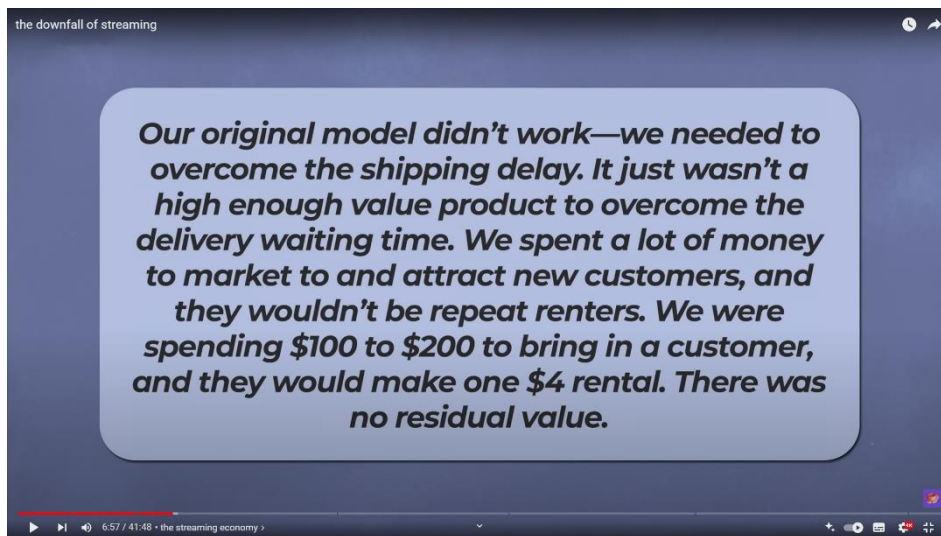


Le on the other hand uses the same technique to include jokes and comments – for example, when at 2:25 the note “also yes my bangs are crazy and i didn’t notice until after i was done!!!” (Example 16 below). For showing quotes and keywords, Le has the text appear on screen either over an image or a plain background such as at 6:42 when a quote appears in black text on a blue background (Example 17 below).

**Example 16: text appearing on screen next to Le**

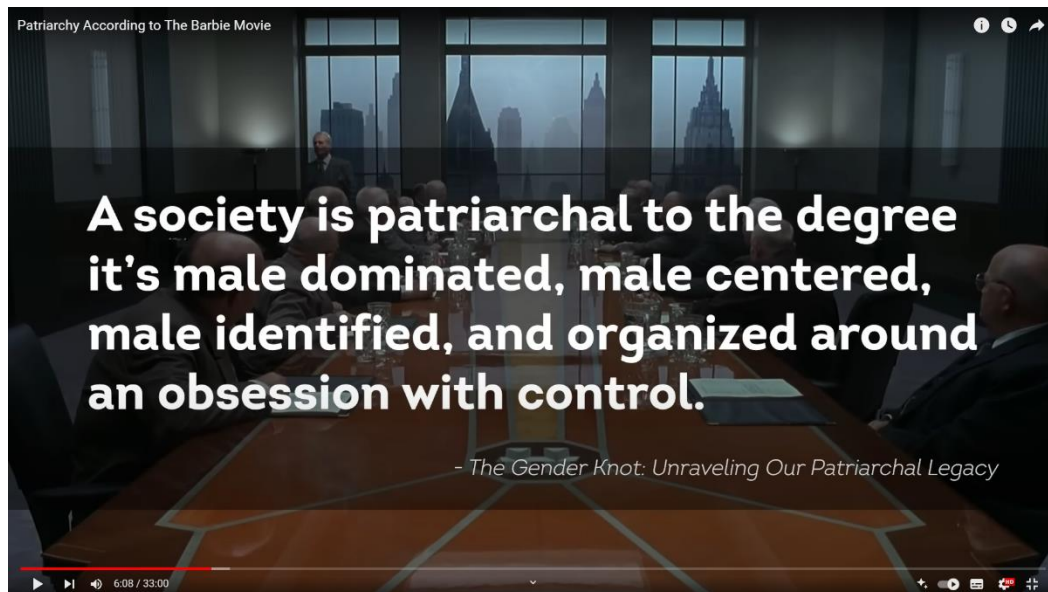


**Example 17: quote highlighted over a plain background in Le's video**



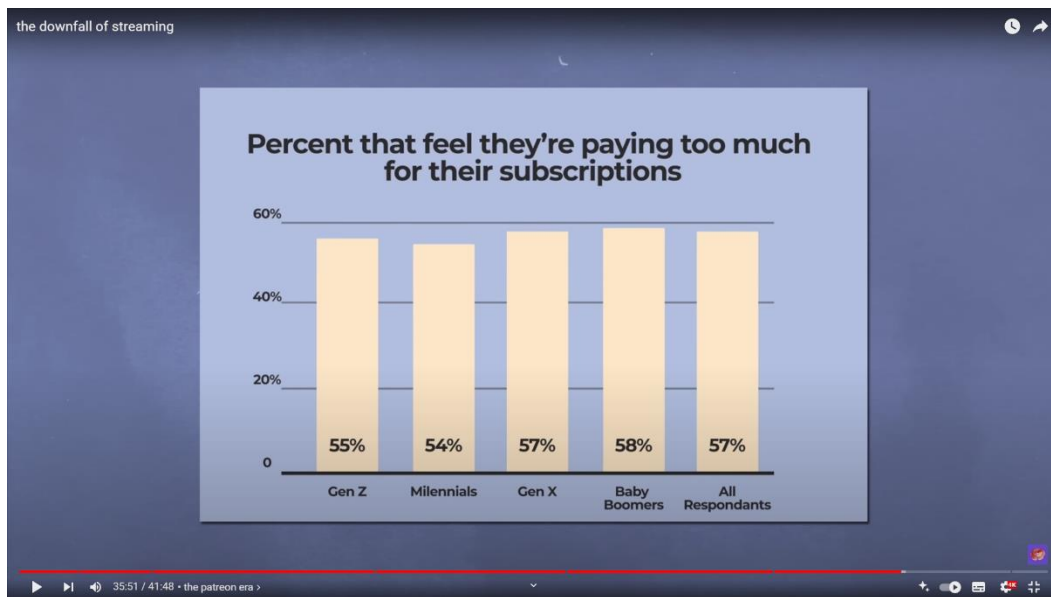
This is similarly used by Detective who, at 6:07, overlays a quote about patriarchal control over a clip of men standing in a boardroom (Example 18 below).

**Example 18: quote highlighted over a clip playing in the background, in Detective's video**

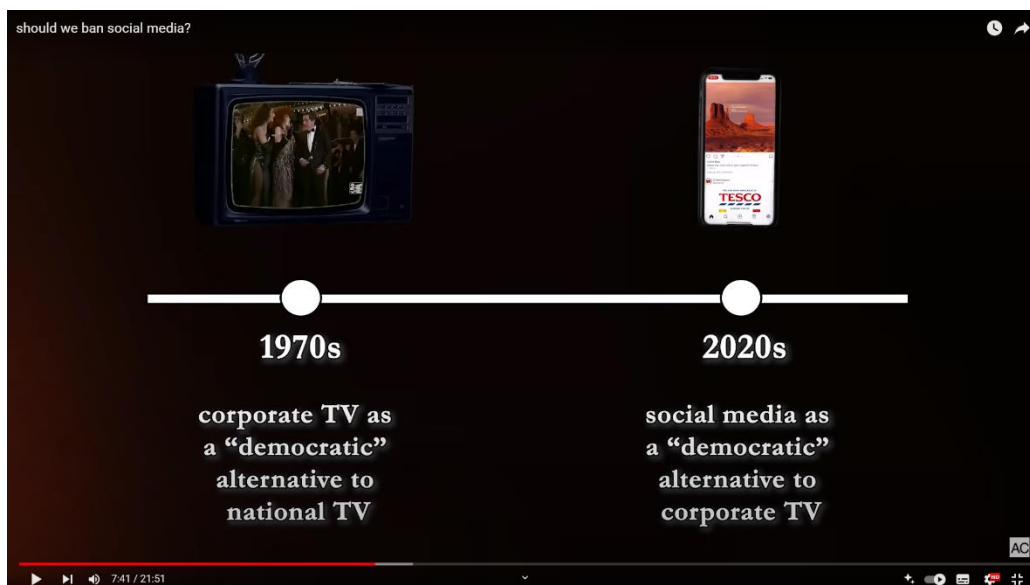


Of the three graphics depicting data are used mostly by Le, one example being when she uses a graph at 35:51 (Example 19), however, Cappelle also uses a timeline at 7:34 (Example 20). The point of the graphics showing the data which is discussed seems to showcase another value present in the video essay community which has to do with making one's point as clear and understandable as possible. Once again, the clearly highlighted quotes and keywords serve to communicate the same value.

### Example 19: a graph used in Le' video



### Example 20: a timeline used in Cappelle's video



Multimodality overall is hugely prevalent in these videos, and it seems that the ability to competently employ a variety of clips, screenshots and images is one of the things that mark these creators as expert users of the genre. Three additional purposes for relying on multimodality could be identified here: to back the creator's argument, to create a humorous effect, and to provide a contextualizing backdrop to the creator's voiceover.

The first function of incorporating multimodality in the video, to back the creators' argument, can be seen illustrated as follows. For example, when at the 5:20 mark Cappelle says that “In the past, people generally identified to one national discourse, one history forged by political elites”, what follows is the video of general Charles de Gaulle’s speech in French, with the accompanying translation provided by Cappelle “Paris is broken, Paris is martyred, but Paris free, freed by itself” (Example 21).

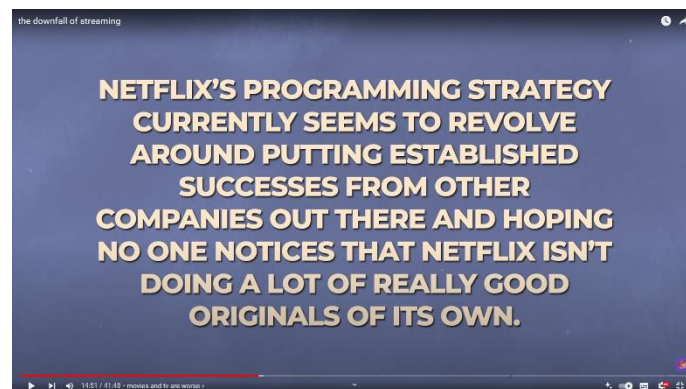
Similarly, at 3:26 Detective says that “the term [patriarchy] has been used it’s traditionally been as a joke to mock feminists or feminism” and follows it with a series of clips such as the clip from the movie *10 things I hate about you*, where the main male lead is glad to have missed a lecture talking about patriarchy (Example 22).

And lastly, when at 14:28 Le says: “Maybe it would be easier to accept the price gouging if the content was actually getting better, but many people feel like it’s actually getting worse.”, she follows it by a quote by Alex Crantz written out on the screen about Netflix’s lack of good original programs (Example 23).

**Example 21: footage of de Gaulle’s speech, with Cappelle’s translation (left), Example 22: clip taken from *10 things I hate about you* used in Detective’s video (right)**



**Example 23: quote written over a plain background in Le’s video**



The second purpose of the use multimodality in the videos is the humorous effect. For example, Le goes on to show a clip from *Emily in Paris*, a series made by Netflix, where the character Emily shouts, “This is Paris.”, followed by cricket sounds. This shows that multimodality also add a humorous element to the video (Example 24).

**Example 24: clip taken from *Emily in Paris* used in Le’s video**



Detective also relies on this strategy, for example at 3:08 after he says: “patriarchy is not a synonym for men nor is it a code word for masculinity and it certainly has nothing to do with hating men.”, after which he plays a clip from the movie *Barbie*, in which the character of Allan says: “I’m confused about that” with his hands on his hips (Example 25).

**Example 25: clip taken from *Barbie*, featuring the character Alan, used in Detective’s video**



The humor serves to help moderate the tone of the video, counterbalancing more serious topics. It also seems to serve to connect with the viewers – Le appeals to the common opinion that Emily in Paris is not a good show and shows that she shares that opinion. Detective shows a benevolent character reacting to a complex concept in a way which may make the viewer feel less alienated by their lack of knowledge on the topic.

Lastly, multimodality may also simply provide a sort of contextualizing backdrop to the creator’s voiceover. When Cappelle talks about the development of Italian television, at 3:58, saying “He created a bunch of regional private channels with advertisements that aired the same program at the same time.” On the screen the viewers see advertisements for these same channels (Example 26).

**Example 26: advertisement for an Italian TV channel used in Cappelle’s video**



Detective describes how “Kens make patriarchy happen by doing it” at 6:39 and accompanies it with the Ken characters coming into Barbieland to take it away from Barbie (Example 27). Lastly, in Le’s video at 20:12 she notes how she is “sure its [Fight Club’s] success has actually given David Fincher way more sway in fighting against any producers who don’t fully trust his vision.”, while clips of a movie being produced by David Fincher and footage of it being edited play in the background (Example 28).

**Example 27:** clip taken from *Barbie*, showing Kens taking over Barbieland, used in Detective's video



**Example 28:** clip of David Fincher producing a film used in Le's video



This use of multimodality may stem from both the affordances and constraints of video. If the creators above mentioned and explained every example they used, it might take up too much time and make the video unnecessarily long. On the other hand, if they do not include it, they are leaving out information relevant to their argument. Thus, they utilize the affordance of modern video to combine sound and image and portray the relevant information while still retaining a coherent structure in their text.

## 3.2 Discourse community surrounding the genre

A member of the discourse community surrounding the video essay genre can participate in it as either a creator or a viewer, where naturally one person can be both, depending on whether they are viewing other people's content or creating their own. The creators however, as stated in Chapter 2, cannot predict whether their content will be viewed exclusively by their community due to context collapse. However, the audience can be assumed to consist of at least a few discourse communities, as will be elaborated in the following sections.

### 3.2.a The Thumbnail

In all three examples used so far, the video titles have been written in such a way that might intrigue the audience. The title of Alice Cappelle's video, as stated before, implies she is partaking in some kind of discussion by stating a question – should we ban social media? Mina Le offers a strong yet composed stance in her title, by contrasting a dramatic word such as “downfall” with all lower-case spelling of the title. Le accompanies the phrase in the title with the keyword in the thumbnail image which viewers may not be familiar with, therefore she offers not only a possible critique or commentary but possibly some form of education as well, as shown in Example 2 above. The Pop Culture Detective purposefully contrasts a large and complex topic of patriarchy with the mainstream Barbie movie – a movie whose titular character is a children's toy, thus creating tension, as shown in Example 3. Here the viewers may hope to find a critique or review of the movie as well as a commentary on, or explanation of patriarchy through the lens of said movie. These notions of discussions, critique, commentary, education and review may be considered as important values in the community of people who view video essays. There is an emphasis on engaging with recent and relevant events or phenomena by linking them to larger and broader topics found in social sciences.

The second community consists of people who are interested in the content of a particular creator. These two communities in a way overlap: a fan of the creator may also be a fan of video essays in general, or they may not care for the video essay genre but like the creator's style or personality. Cappelle and Le appeal to their viewers by including a prominent and recognizable photo of themselves in the thumbnail (Examples 1 and 2). They separate themselves from the other elements of the thumbnail further by outlining their image in a thin pink/purple line. By



using a first and last name as their username as well as their own image in their profile picture they create a clearer connection and sense of familiarity between themselves and their audience, since names and photos may feel more direct and personal than a more abstract username (Examples 4 and 6). Pop Culture Detective uses a different approach. His username is more akin to a job description than a name. His profile picture is a stylized eye with red striking red eyelids and a multicolored eyelid, adding to the persona of a somebody who observes, in this case, “pop culture” (Example 5). Since he does not include pictures of himself in the video’s thumbnail, his signature style of thumbnail becomes a way for his viewers to recognize the video as his without necessarily seeing his username. This style consists of a still from the piece of pop culture he will be referencing, with two lines of white text in all capitals, with the term describing the aspect of the media the video will focus on written in bold (Example 3).

Lastly, the thumbnail may attract members of various discourse communities who do not necessarily have a particular interest in the video essay as a genre or the creator who posted the video but are instead interested in elements they see portrayed in the title and/or thumbnail. Cappelle’s video may appeal to people who use social media, those in favor, those against and even those who believe they are neutral about it. Le’s video may appeal to discourse communities which center around The Watcher YouTube channel, the television series The Rings of Power, or even more broadly the users of streaming services in general. Detective’s video similarly may appeal to people who are more connected to notions of feminism or have an interest in the patriarchal structure, people who enjoy films, and/or the Barbie film specifically, or even people who are interested only in any of the actors depicted in the thumbnail.

### 3.2.b Icons and the video description

As stated in Chapter 3.2, the icons beneath the video are oriented towards engagement and potentially the community. The number of subscribers tells the viewer the size of the community which surrounds a particular creator and pressing the “subscribe” button allows the viewer to join this community of subscribers. The like button also sends a message; how many people have seen the video and enjoyed it enough to press a button – even if they do not press the button the viewer may feel a sense of inclusion if they also liked it. Notably, if they did not, there is no direct way of knowing whether they are in the majority or minority compared to the people who liked the video. The website also encourages interdiscursivity by placing the “share” function in a somewhat prominent place – encouraging the viewer to further expand

the discursive community around it. The higher level of engagement leading perhaps to the creator becoming a more prominent member within the creators side of the discursive community centered around the video essay.

In the description of the video the creators in all three cases also encourage engagement however, here they emphasize content and ways of engaging outside of YouTube. Cappelle and Le (Examples 7, 10 and 11) encourage interaction with the sponsors of their video. Cappelle and Detective (Examples 7, 8 and 9) promote their Patreon accounts, Detective links both his Patreon and the bonus content that can be found on it, as well as an embedded link at the bottom of the description which leads to the Patreon but reads “Support Pop Detective/Help me make more videos!”, emphasizing the role the Patron supporters play in the production of his content. Cappelle on the other hand, addresses her viewers in a more casual and perhaps friendly way by writing out the offer and adding a sparkle emoji and using less formal register to lighten the tone of the message, as seen in Example 28.

**Example 28:**

🌟 You can support the channel on Patreon and you'll get to join our discord chat and livestreams + you will have access to bonus videos

Detective writes to his viewers when he encourages them to “Help translate this video over on Amara” and in the section labeled comments. In the latter he uses a more formal register, as shown in Example 29.

**Example 29:**

*Some YouTube comments may be held for approval to reduce the number of trolls. If you'd like to participate in constructive online conversations about this video, please share it on your social media networks.*

Here Detective encourages a certain type of behavior – “un-troll-like” comments indirectly and “constructive online conversations” directly.

All three creators also include links to their other social media accounts, namely Instagram accounts (and TikTok accounts in the case of Le and Detective).

### 3.2.c The Video Essay

#### Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are two types of audience’s creators encounter – the real one and the imagined one. However, YouTube creators are offered a variety of analytics and statistic data which allows them to create a more “accurate” imagined audience. According to RivalIQ

(2023) these analytics are divided into: Overview, Content, Engagement and Audience, they can be applied to the overall channel or just specific videos. Overview shows the number of views on a video, the overall watch time, number of subscribers and the “estimated revenue (however, only users who are part of the YouTube Partner Program will have a Revenue tab). Through the Content section users are told how their audience “finds and interacts” with their content while the Audience section informs them of detail about their audience. It divides the audience into new viewers, returning viewers, subscribers and total members. Lastly, the Research section tells the users what their audience searches for on YouTube’s platform besides their content. If the users wish to look at the analytics for a specific video the Content section is replaced by the Reach section, which informs them of “how your audience is discovering your channel and includes metrics like impressions, click-through-rate, views, and unique viewers”. Additionally, the overview tab will include the “key moments for audience retention” On YouTube Help’s page there is also an explanation of the “advanced mode” offered to users. Through it users can view more detailed analytics (such as analytics for specific geographical areas), compare the data between one video and another as well as export this data into other formats.

This means that while viewers can still not predict the entirety of their audience in the case of future videos, they can make educated guesses based on analytics from previous videos. These analytics may also influence the way creators make their content – for example if the analytics show most of their viewers skip their introduction section, they might shorten it or adapt a new more engaging format in the future. Once again, this shows that while engagement may not be part of the core values promoted by the video essay discourse community, it is part of the values promoted by the platform and as such is present across most communities on it.

In the videos themselves the creators will use a variety of ways to communicate with their audience through various strategies. Alice Cappelle begins her video by sharing a personal anecdote “So a few months ago, I did my first French workshop on social media and social justice, and it was really, really cool.”. Here she tells her viewers something about herself (she is a person who attends workshops), gives herself credibility (she has received some form of education on the topic she will be covering), and uses informal language which sets a relaxed and casual atmosphere. She goes on to share her experience of the workshop and the insight she gained from it and indicated a more intimate confession of her own negative experiences at 0:27, as shown in Example 30.

### **Example 30**

*To be honest, all participants, no matter their age, said that too much time spent on social media led to problems of anxiety, FOMO, self-hatred, loss of confidence or forgetfulness, which is definitely true for me.*

At the end of her short introduction, Cappelle includes her viewers into the discussion (1:13, Example 31):

### **Example 31:**

*We don't need to prove why social media are bad. You see, we repeated so much that it has become common sense. Now, if we all agree that social media are bad, why don't we ban them? That's the question we're going to ask ourselves today.*

The “we” is not elaborated on, but it can be presumed to be the audience of the video or society in general. She makes no distinction between viewers who are new to her channel and those who already follow her content. She does, however, show a clear expectation regarding her audience – that they also believe social media is bad. Lastly, she states a clear goal for her video and her audience – to ask themselves a question. It can also be argued that by saying “today” she takes herself out of the context of her time and places herself in the temporal context of her viewer, prioritizing their imagined “today” over her concrete one.

Detective is significantly more distant in his introduction. He begins his video with an impersonal it-structure: “It’s hard to overstate...”. He goes on to introduce a group of people separate from his audience “who were decidedly unenthusiastic” about the Barbie movie (0:44) with a montage of clips. At 1:11 is when he addresses the viewers with: “If you’ve seen the movie, you might be confused”. Shortly after, at 1:37, he states “There is something truly poisonous underpinning this backlash that I do think is worth taking seriously”. Here he makes a serious moral judgement about the commentary surrounding the movie and provides in a way a reason behind his interest in the topic. Finally, at 2:31 (Example 32), he both distances himself and includes himself with his audience, as shown below.

### **Example 32:**

*While there are many legitimate criticisms of the Barbie movies feminism or lack thereof this video essay is not going to address those questions. Instead, we're going to use the movie as a sort of primary to help explain what patriarchy actually is what it isn't and how it ends up harming everyone including men.*

By making the video essay an separate entity from himself, he distances himself, but then goes on to use the unspecified “we”, similarly to Cappelle, to address his real audience. Another similarity with Cappelle is the notion that the viewer and the creator are curious about the same thing – asking/addressing the same questions and that they are doing this in some way together. This is even though the creators are the one publicly posing the question, doing the research

and providing possible answers in a video essay format, while the audience who they invite to engage may not perhaps do anything except view passively.

In the case of Mina Le, the video opens with a shot of herself greeting the viewer.

**Example 33:**

*Hello, my beautiful doves. My name is Mina Le, and on this channel, I talk about fashion, media, and things happening in the culture.*

This is followed by an animation with a title card with her username, written on banner, held up by two doves with crowns. The doves lift and show a stage with a cat above which is her social media username above it and TikTok and Instagram icons on both side of it (Example 34, 35).

**Example 34: animated clip of two doves holding up a banner with “Mina Le” written on it**



**Example 35: animated clip of a cat on stage, with the Instagram logo, the username @gremlita and TikTok's logo hanging above it, used in Mina Le's video (continuation of Example 34)**



Le establishes a stronger connection with her audience than the previous two creators by naming it beautiful doves. While it can be presumed the name is primarily intended for returning viewers as a term of endearment and a signifier of belonging to a community, she includes potential new viewers by introducing herself and her content in a succinct way. Her relationship with her audience is further enforced by the animation: the doves with crowns which represent her audience and the cat on the stage representing her. The use of social media icons letting new viewers know where else they can find her content.

Similarly to Detective's video, the next section is a sequence of clips referring to media, technology, streaming, Netflix and money, while electronic instrumental music plays in the background. Then the music abruptly stops as she cuts to a clip of a woman saying, "6 dollars, man, absolutely not!". The music then resumes, and a title card is displayed with the name of the video. With this the tone of the video is clearly communicated to the viewer as serious and the attitude toward streaming as negative.

There is another cut as Le appears on screen again to introduce the sponsor of the video, this is the section that deviates the most from the other two videos. The sponsor is ThredUp – an "online consignment and thrift store". The use of this sponsor shows that Le (and her sponsor) presumed that a significant portion of the audience belongs to discourse communities concerning fashion as well as video essays. Since, as Le herself states, the two often overlap on her channel it is somewhat of a safe bet that the portion of the audience subscribed to her channel will be interested in both. She cuts to a shot of items she apparently got from the sponsor spread on her bed and then cuts again to a series of clip of herself styling the items (Examples 36 and 37).

**Example 36: footage of clothing items strewn on Le's bed, used in her video to promote her sponsor**



**Example 37: clip of Le promoting items from her sponsor with the items listed on either side of her**



These shots are promotional, but more personal and customized than the previous clip where, she speaks at the camera while reciting a pitch that appears quite scripted. This balancing of the professional script and the personalized montage is perhaps meant to cater to the value of authenticity towards her audience. Furthermore, in the clips she also provides commentary which includes personal details such as: “As an aside, I love putting bold greens, blues, and reds together. So yeah, this is like, this is like candy to me, this outfit.”. She also further encourages a connection with her audience with comments such as: “if you’ve been following me on Instagram, you know I’ve been really into baseball and sportswear in general lately” and she encourages it to engage with her by saying “So yeah, let me know which outfit you like the best”.

The content so far has belonged to the section she labeled “intro” and after concluding the promotional material she cuts to the next section which she titles: “watcher entertainment discourse”. In the first shot of this section, next to her head appears a white text that says: “also yes my bangs are crazy and i didn’t notice until after i was done!!!!” (as seen in Example 16), it then disappears and is replaced by text on the opposite side of the screen: “i just cut them and have no idea how to style clearly”. This implies that she expects her audience will be paying attention to her appearance and that she feels it is relevant to explain “faults” in her appearance to her audience. There is an element of authenticity value in this but also a vulnerability towards her audience.

While these editorial notes appear on screen she is saying (2:21) the following words, shown in Example 38 below.

**Example 38:**

*Last month, one of the things happening in the culture, specifically my culture as a YouTuber, Watcher Entertainment got into controversy when they announced they were quitting YouTube to launch a new streaming platform where people would have to pay 5.99 a month to access any future content.*

This can be linked to both Cappelle and Detective, in that Le too describes an “inciting event” that in some way affected her and made her interested in the topic which she expands on in the rest of her video. This is consolidated when at the end of the section she states (5:04) the following, shown in Example 39 below.

**Example 39:**

*...the way that the situation has unfolded brought up a lot of thoughts and questions for me personally about the current state of media and I wanted to explore those questions. So today I'm gonna be diving into subscription fatigue. We'll be covering the rise of Netflix, why movies and TV seem to suck today and the importance of owning content.*

Another way in which she differs from the other two creators is perhaps in her acknowledgement of the various kinds of structures which exist within YouTube, which may be expected given her subject matter. For example, while the statement “my culture as a YouTuber” is accompanied by joking a smile and an exaggerated hair toss, it still communicates that Le is a part of a discourse community outside the one surrounding her channel and the video essay genre. That being the community of content creators on YouTube in general. She also acknowledges that there are other genres on the platform which may approach her topic in with a different purpose (4:57): “I’m not a T channel so you know, I don’t wanna make a whole video, a breakdown about them, about the situation...”

## Main section

It can be said that the introduction and, as will be explored later, conclusion are the most rich in terms of instances of various strategies through which creators actively engage their viewers, but there are instances of it even in the more structured main sections.

Cappelle continues to engage her viewers with perhaps relatable anecdotes from her personal life, such as at the beginning of her main section when she quotes first her father (2:04):



**Example 40:**

*My dad sums it up very efficiently. He says that the people who created the technology don't let their kids use it.*

Then her mother at 2:56:

**Example 41:**

*...when we were young, me and my sister, my mom often told us that corporate TV was meant to numb our brains to then sell us, junk food or, I don't know.*

Here she also references her sister, and by sharing these small details from her family life she imbues the video further with the value of authenticity while staying on topic.

Cappelle engages with her viewers using non-verbal tactics as well. At 2:30, when she is discussing the kinds of content that gets more or less promotion on social media, she says: "On the other hand, analytical content with complex language and concepts doesn't perform as well." She says it with what appears to be a sour smile and as she says the final line the shot zooms in on her face for emphasis, as shown in Example 42. This sarcastic facial expression along with the editing appears to be a way of communicating to her viewers that she is talking about her own content as part of the content that does not "perform well" due to it being analytical and more "complex".

**Example 42: Cappelle in a close up used for emphasis**



Another way in which Capelle imbues her work with authenticity is through "bloopers". At 6:25, she mispronounces "neo liberalization", makes a grimace while laughing and says: "Oh my God, I will never be able to pronounce this word." While hitting her palm with her fist in a

show of frustration (Example 43). Since the video is highly edited it is obvious this clip was left in on purpose. It acts as a humorous contrast to the rest of the video which is scripted and more formal in tone. It could be argued it makes her appear more sympathetic and “relatable” to her viewers.

**Example 43: Cappelle hitting her palm with her fist**



Cappelle also uses graphic tools for the benefit of her viewers, which is also a good example of the strategic use of multimodality mentioned in section 3.1.c. At 7:30 she states: “So to make it clear, if we had to draw a quick timeline...” and accompanies it with a timeline appearing on screen (Example 20). Thus, by employing the affordance of this visual medium she helps her viewers follow along to what is being said and makes her point more pronounced. She also uses verbal emphasis such as “keep in mind that...” (8:01) again making sure to communicate to the viewer what she considers to be the key point of her video. This is something that will happen again, for example at 17:31, near the end of the video. Cappelle will make sure to summarize her previous points before moving to her final ones by saying: “Okay, so far we have shown...” which reinforces the connection with the viewer, despite the fact that, as mentioned in the paragraph covering her introduction, she is the one doing the “showing” with no way of knowing to what actual extent her real audience is engaging with what she is saying.

At 8:14 she gives another brief anecdote from her personal life, about confronting one of Meta’s executives. She ends it by saying: “The conversation did not end there, but I won’t go into the drama today.”, thus potentially setting up future content in which she would “go into it”.

Furthermore, as she continues talking about Meta's new policies, she addresses the viewer (at 9:32, as shown in Example 44, and again at 10:31, as shown in Example 45).

**Example 44:**

*The political things that should make you rise from your bed or couch and organize. It feels like they give you the option to remove yourself from a specific political reality. The political content button can be turned on or off, but when it's off, it means that you let them force their political reality, their vision of the world, onto you. What is that vision? Well, it's the same as with Berlusconi. It's the conformist, consumerist lifestyle.*

**Example 45:**

*And even if you don't care about the political consequences of that way of life, think about how it affects you, your sense of self, the creation of meaning. Do social media really make you feel good? I don't think so. In fact, I've made a few videos arguing the contrary.*

Here Cappelle is being quite assertive toward the viewer (“...you let them force... how it affects you, your sense of self”). She asks questions she perhaps expects her viewers to ask and answers them. In answering them she further establishes her own stance and her expectations of the viewer. In the first part she makes an assertion about the perceived vision Meta is promoting as being “conformist, consumerist”. She establishes she considers this to be a negative thing, and it can be assumed she expects her viewers to agree with her. This is further emphasized in the second instance where her expectation of her audience is more explicit: “Do social media really make you feel good? I don't think so.”. To add weight to this statement, and perhaps to promote her content, she adds “I've made a few videos arguing the contrary” making it clear that this is something she takes quite seriously.

At 18:03 she begins her third and final section, which is also the shortest.

**Example 46:**

*So, is there a way out of this? At the moment? Not really. I mean, you probably saw an ad before watching this video, and it's likely that I have a sponsored segment at the end of it. So, yeah, my criticism exists in the context of what I criticize. I'm an anti-capitalist on a capitalist platform...*

Once again, she employs the rhetorical questions she perhaps expects her audience would ask. She acknowledges that she participates in the system she is critiquing and interestingly allows her audience another glimpse into the process of making her video by stating that at the time she films her content she is not certain whether the video will be sponsored or not.

After her initial somber self-criticism, she goes on to say (18:37) as follows below.

**Example 47:**

*I've always, always prioritized what I love over money. That's why I quit law to do English studies aka unemployment studies. But yeah, I'm very lucky that now I'm in a position where I do something I'm passionate about and I'm financially comfortable.*

With this she shares a facet of her personality (a somewhat romantic attitude toward her pursuits) and her past (her academic path) with the viewer. She lightens the mood of the previous paragraphs by making a joke at the expense of her major and acknowledges the privilege of her position. Through all this she promotes transparency and a degree of humility, an awareness that perhaps her viewers with the same passions are not at liberty to pursue them to the same extent.

She regains her self-assuredness as she states:

**Example 48:**

*The reason why I'm here, though, is because that's where people are. If I have a message to share, I go where people are, and I make sure I use all the tools available to be as effective as possible in sharing that message.*

With this she provides justification for why she participates in the system she opposes, characterizing it as a necessary means to an end. She also communicates that she views her content as “messages” which she wishes to share with “people”. This could be regarded as an invitation for the audience to engage with her content, seeing as usually when one receives a message they are expected to reply.

She continues in this more positive tone, as at 19:14 she says the following.

**Example 49:**

*We create bridges towards alternative ways of living, being and thinking. It's not revolutionary, it's true, but it's a way out of the path to alienation.*

Offering here the somewhat paradoxical notion that social media can make its users feel less alienated, same as it made them feel alienated, depending on its usage.

She goes on to suggest how the movement she does support could improve (19:35): “And I feel like as anti-capitalists, we're lacking there. [valuing entertainment]”. She sums her final section by saying (19:43):

**Example 50:**

*I mean we are making progress in the context of a system we can't compete with, but from which we can create alternatives that aren't meant to remain alternatives.*

In doing this she acknowledges the struggle many of her followers presumably share – of participating in a system they do not support – and ways in which they can endeavor to improve it.

When it comes to the Detective's video, its main section begins with the title card which echoes the thumbnail, except the background image is now a clip of the Kens fighting on the beach in the Barbie movie. This multimodal syncing and complementing of his script and the clips he uses is present throughout the video. Interestingly, at 3:08 after Detective explains a common misconception about patriarchy, he includes the clip of a character saying "Yeah, I'm confused about that." (Example 25). It can be argued that this clip is a stand in for the audience, a way for Detective to make the subject matter feel less daunting.

Like Cappelle, he also uses the pronoun "we", referring to himself and his imagined audience, but the potential viewer still feels included. An example being at 3:56 when he says "...we begin to see...". The inclusive aspect is applied through a presumed shared experience between the viewer and the creator, another example being the idea that his audience watches a variety of movies made in Hollywood ("something we almost never see in Hollywood.", 10:30). There is also the inclusive "we" used in the introduction which encourages the viewer to actively engage with the video, notably at 6:15: "We're going to go over what all of that means...".

Time is also something that is presumed to be shared – at 21:11 Detective says: "we only have time to scratch the surface on this topic". It would perhaps make more sense for him to say that "he" only had the time, since he is the person in charge of researching and creating the video and has a limited amount of time to do so. The viewer, on the other hand, can pause and play and rewatch the video as many times as they like, they may, theoretically, rewatch the video ten times in a row, or only watch it in 5-minute increments over the week. The use of the "we" however, once again enforces the idea of a shared experience and a connection between creator and audience.

Throughout the video, Detective makes sure to point out important concepts and ideas to the viewers with phrases such as "the important thing to remember" (6:20) or "keep in mind that" (7:09). As in the beginning he also makes sure to continuously address any apprehension he predicts the viewer might feel through phrases such as "[male identification] is a little more complicated, but it is a critical piece of the patriarchal puzzle." (13:30). He acknowledged the complicated concept but also justifies to the viewers why they should make the effort of understanding it.

There is also the use of the pronoun "you". At 11:23, he employs it when illustrating a point of how easy it is to view male-centered stories: "all you have to do is turn on the news or go to the movies and you'll be inundated with endless stories centering men."

Detective also imbues his video with the value of authenticity – through apparent transparency. At 7:30 he shares his source: “moving forward in this video I’m going to be heavily borrowing from a book called the gender knot by sociologist Alan G. Johnson.”. Since there are times in his video when he uses phrases such as “this video essay will...” the use of the first person in this case carries a weight to it which also lends makes the value more prominent.

Throughout this main section, however, when comparing Detective and Cappelle, it is noticeable that Detective shares significantly fewer personal experiences or stories. He makes his values clear by making direct statements instead. For example, at 30:33 he states that: “the most important thing men can do is challenge other men on their behavior and encourage them to rebel against patriarchal expectation.”, but he does not offer a personal anecdote or example of a way in which he himself has done this. Thus, he maintains a level of professional distance and privacy from his audience.

Finally, this last main section belongs to Le’s video. It is, as previously mentioned, neatly subdivided using YouTube’s “chapters” function. The main section is divided into four parts by the creator titled: *the streaming economy* (5:22-14:27), *movies and tv are worse* (14:27-22:13), *we own nothing* (22:13-30:40), *the patreon era* (30:40-40:21). While the titles of the first and the last section are relatively neutral statements, the second and third are not. The second section states a clear attitude of the creator, and the third section uses the pronoun “we” to involve the viewers and indicate a presumed shared experience.

Moving on to the contents of the video itself; at the beginning of the first section, 5:41, Le addresses her viewers with “If you’re old enough to remember”. This shows an awareness of the various ages of her potential viewers.

Like Detective and Cappelle, she also makes an effort to engage the viewer and make it easier for them to follow along. One example is at 10:41, when after citing a report regarding statistics filled with technical jargon, she says:

**Example 51:**

*So, what that means, is that, like, in 2023, although streamers gained 164.7 million gross subscriptions, they also recorded 140 million cancellations, which you know isn't too shabby...*

Thus, after offering an official source, and adding credibility to her argument, she summarizes its content and points out what the viewer is meant to take away from it. The shift to a more casual tone at the beginning centers the viewer and the statement at the end serves to tell the viewer what the information means in a way Le assumes will be familiar and accessible to them.

Especially since as shown earlier she is aware that a portion of her audience may be younger and may respond better to a casual register, rather than a professional one.

Another example is when, at 12:31, she introduces a more technical term “analysis paralysis” and follows it up with an explanation addressing the audience: “You just have like too much choice...”. She also creates a link with her audience at the same time not only through language but also through saying “in my experience” implying that she and her audience have a similar issue when it comes to streaming platforms, setting up the sentiment for the third chapter.

Another instance of her relaying her own experiences to contextualize what she is talking about comes later, at 20:48, when she says:

**Example 52:**

*...most of the people that I talk to say they watch movies and shows on their TV while browsing their phone though they know it's a bad habit and I've done it too. Like I'm watching reality TV, I'm not paying attention fully,...*

There is another instance of this at 22:59, when she is discussing the issues of some movies having little to no permanent digital presence, in this instance the personal anecdote serves as an example and for the purposes of contextualizing her argument, but it also explains the motivations behind her attitudes to the viewer.

**Example 53:**

*I came across this struggle because a couple years ago I was trying to watch the movie Life-Size with Tyra Banks and Lindsay Lohan again because I was covering it for a video. I forget what I was doing with that movie exactly, but I will remember that I couldn't find it anywhere. Like there was nowhere that I could rent it digitally. There was nowhere I could stream it. It was like this movie didn't even exist.*

Le also uses phrases which will connect not just with a younger audience, but with an audience familiar with internet trends and jargon. An example being how at 19:40, she says that David Fincher is so “me coded”, meaning that she finds his actions relatable.

The section “we own nothing” opens with a firm statement, shown below in Example 54.

**Example 54:**

*Another issue people have with streaming is that we don't actually own anything even though we're paying for something. This also means that streaming services have the ability to add and remove movies or shows that we like whenever they want. And without consulting anyone or without consulting us.*

Here, like Cappelle, Le makes her own values blatantly clear and assumes her audience shares them. The first half of the message is said directly into the camera by Le in an energetic tone accompanied by lively gestures. This adds a value of authenticity to the message she is conveying. She uses multimodality as well, editing a clip from the movie “The Greatest

Showman” in which a teary-eyed woman is asking “Why didn’t you ask me?” to a man over whose face Le has edited the Netflix logo (Examples 55 and 56). Thus, adding a humorous note to elevate the tone of an otherwise frustrating and serious issue.

Another interesting use of multimodality occurs at 26:46, when the voiceover is stating “It’s like there’s a dark period from like 2000 to like 2013…” in a relatively calm tone. However, on screen the viewers can see a clip of an older computer model getting smashed with a sledgehammer (Example 57). Thus, the creator’s attitude about the gravity of the situation is communicated to the viewer effectively without using up more time in the voiceover.

**Example 55 (left) and Example 56 (right), two-part sequence in Le’s video**



**Example 57: footage of an older computer getting smashed with a sledgehammer, used in Le’s video**

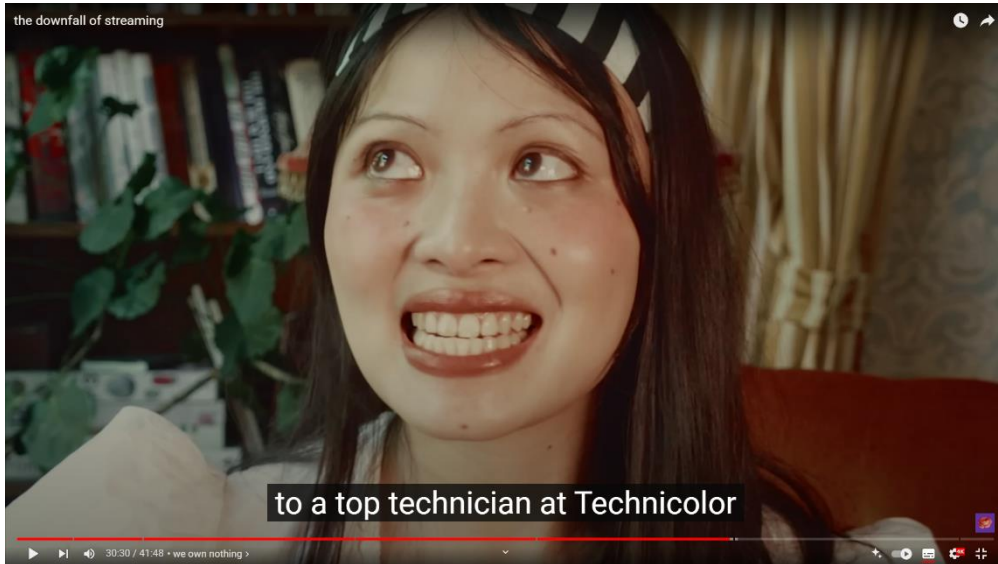


In Le’s video we see an almost identical minor technique for imbuing the video with authenticity, as in Cappelle’s video. It occurs at 30:33, when Le includes a clip zooming in on her face as she mispronounces the word technicolor, laughing as she chokes it out (Example



58). Like Cappelle, Le uses the contrast between the highly edited and scripted video and the simple amusing mistake for humorous effect.

**Example 58: close up of Le's face**



Moving onto Le's final chapter of the main section, the viewers may notice that while the chapter is titled "the patreon era" referencing the website Patreon, the title card on screen reads "the patronage era" (Example 59). The title card thus places an emphasis on the act of patronage, potentially to be more engaging for viewers who are also the presumed patrons, rather than the website which they may use.

**Example 59: title card at the beginning of *the patreon era* chapter in Le's video**



This section's opening, similar to the previous one, has the purpose of strengthening the bond between the creator and the viewers in this instance, however it is achieved through vulnerability. At 31:07, after briefly returning to the Watcher' controversy, Le states (31:07) the following (Example 60).

**Example 60:**

*I don't blame them for this decision because you know, as much as I love my job, social media platforms are scary as hell. Like you never have any sort of job security, not only because of algorithms, but also because a platform could literally just go away.*

This lets the viewer in on an aspect of content creation which they might not have firsthand experience of and a personal insecurity which the creator has. This continues throughout the section, with Le explaining the motivations creators have for having multiple platforms and the issues with the platforms themselves. Through this she reveals to the viewers, who may not be part of the creator community, that she possesses apparent knowledge and skill to navigate this creator community.

Le also references the smaller community surrounding the YouTube video essay genre and comments on it. Near the end of the main section (38:27) she states: "I do feel like especially in like the video essay type of sphere, there is a pressure to be pushing out longer and longer and longer videos." In doing so she is ruminating on a possible shift in the genre's convention.

## Conclusion

The final section of the video essay is its conclusion.

Alice Capelle opens her concluding section (20:00) by stating the following (Example 61).

**Example 61:**

*So yeah, that's it for today. I hope you enjoyed it. As always, the conversation continues in the comments section. Don't forget to like to subscribe if it's not already done. I would like to thank my patrons for their support and a special thanks to top tier patrons.*

This serves as a very casual "outro" focused on suggesting further actions that can be taken by the viewer, such as commenting, subscribing, liking and in a less direct way visiting or even joining her Patreon. This is accompanied by lively gestures, such as her pointing downwards "toward" the comment section (Example 62). Another example is her pointing her finger at the camera and leaning in in a mock threatening them to like and subscribe (Example 63). She goes on to list her top tier patrons, by name. There is an obviously closer relationship between her and the patrons of the channel, who help fund it, than the rest of the viewers. This may incentivize other viewers to join it if they grow especially fond of the content she creates.

Through this there also is a small additional discourse community which is based not around the video essay itself, but the creator’s channel (though there is, as mentioned, plenty of overlap).

**Example 62: Cappelle pointing down “toward” her comment section**



**Example 63: Cappelle leaning in and waving her finger at the camera**



The last thing she mention is a thanks to her sponsor: Squarespace, though that thanks is quickly followed by “I said it earlier, you gotta survive in that system...”. After “system”, she looks down and the rest of the sentence is mumbled. Then the video cuts to the video clip prepared by the website and what can be presumed to be a preapproved script, though she does personalize the ad by showing her own account on the sponsors website. After running the

promotional clip and information, the video cuts back to Cappelle, who seemingly apologetically murmurs: “[unintelligible] I need to pay myself and my team.”, justifying her actions to the audience she imagines to be at least partially anti-capitalist. She thanks Squarespace once again and waves goodbye to her viewers (21:40) “I’ll see you very soon, salut!”, including a word in her native language, French. The final five seconds of the video are dedicated to listing the names of patrons once again, while the message: “Support the channel on Patreon” is displayed on top of the screen (Example 64).

**Example 64: final clip in Cappelle’s video, promoting her Patreon account and listing the names of her supporters**



When it comes to Detective’s video essay, it has a subtle shift marking the main section and the conclusion, but it can be noticed at 30:51, when he once again speaks about patriarchy through statements which are more generalized. He also answers one of the questions he posed in the introduction about why certain people were upset by the movie. He separates his personal answer from the other arguments he has, which were taken from outside sources, with the use of “I”.

At 32:01 there is a marked change to the rest of the video, as shown in Example 66. Similarly to Cappelle, it is the section meant for the promotion of the creators Patreon and a chance to encourage viewer interaction. The section begins with a red screen opening, like an eye, to reveal the Detective, while soft piano music plays in the background. The imagery of an open eye remains further present by the red edges of the screen angled in contrast to the white background. Here Detective includes a clip of himself next to the Patron toggle, credits for the production (Jonathan McIntosh) and outro music (Rick Lopez). He also includes a list of script

consultants (Carolyn Petit, Felicia Lopez, Martin Leduc, Ryan DeCarsky). At 32:02 there is a cut, where the credits are replaced by the title “These videos are 100% funded by the viewers”. Below the title are two columns “scrolling through” the names of the supposed Patron supporters, up until 32:43.

In the clip the viewers see him standing up, unlike the other two creators, who were sitting in front of the camera, their faces shown in a close-up shot. He does, however, include a microphone like the other two. Behind him is a board presumably meant to absorb sound, from this the viewers can assume that this is where he films his audio recordings. The orange cat on the shelf is perhaps meant to endear the viewers and offer information about himself in an indirect way – he is a person who likes and owns at least one cat. The slightly scruffy yet tidy appearance of his tussled hair and comfortable clothing, combined with the other elements all serve to imbue the value of video with the value of authenticity.

In the clip he gives a short speech (shown in Example 65 below), which appears rehearsed but not necessarily scripted or overly edited (another appeal to authenticity, perhaps) and his tone is even and polite.

#### **Example 65**

*Thanks for watching, uh, if you like these kind of long form video essays please consider going over to Patreon to help back our project there. I've also left a link to Paypal in the description below if you prefer that. Uh, these videos are 100% funded by viewers like you, there are no ads and no corporate sponsorships so anything you can do to help out is much appreciated. I have a whole bunch of other videos in the works including one on the myth of the alpha male another one on redemption in death for male characters in Hollywood and finally a project on board games and colonialism. So, if you'd like to see any of those, uh please make sure you subscribe, you like, all that jazz and I will see you again next time.*

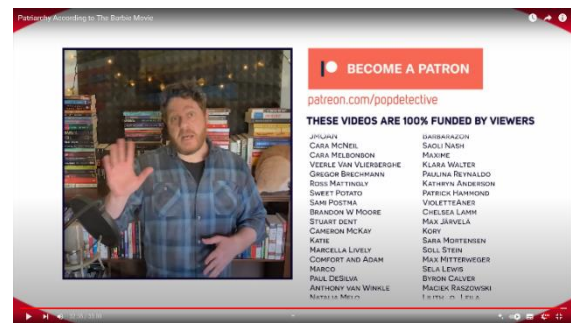
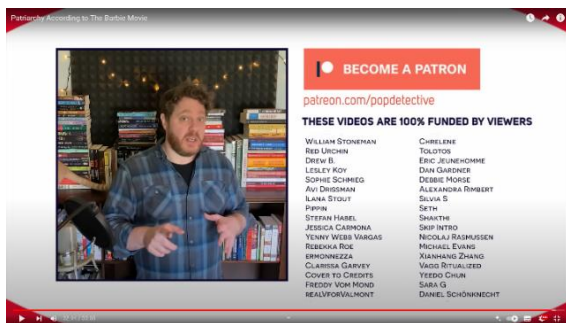
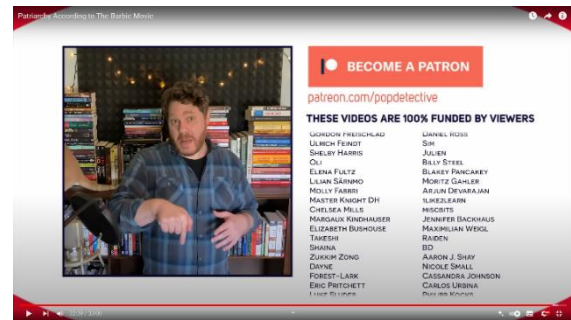
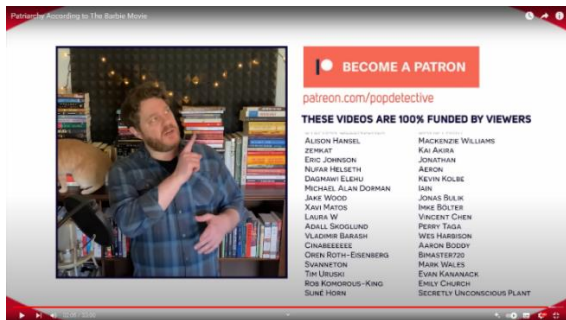
Unlike Cappelle, Detective does not actively encourage his viewers to interact with his content through the tools available on the platform. He begins by appealing to the discourse community which centers video essays and requests their support. He also offers two alternate modes for providing this support, showing perhaps his awareness of what his audience is more prone to use. As said, this is an effort to gain support for his channel, which he seems to refer to as a “project”. He is also sure to further encourage support through showing his appreciation and makes the effort to encourage those who can perhaps give very little.

Immediately after, he lists concrete future projects he is working on – presenting himself as credible and indirectly saying where the money donated will potentially be directed to. In the final sentence he asks his viewers to engage with the video through the options provided by Youtube: “subscribe, ... like, all that jazz”. Finally, it can be argued that the casual “see you

again next time”, while promoting a sense of familiarity also serves as more of an encouragement for viewers to return to the channel than a simple “bye” would.

In terms of his body language, worth pointing out is how he points to his left, which is where the Patreon logo is in the video (32:06, Example 66), when he asks the viewers to join. He also points down in the next sentence, when referring to the video description (Example 67). Thus, like Cappelle, he indirectly engages with the two-dimensional space of the website, from the perspective of the audience. At 32:14 he points at the camera after saying “viewers like you”, further engaging the viewer and indirectly interacting with them as much as with the space (Example 68). Lastly, at 32:40 he gives a small wave as he finishes the clip (Example 69).

**Examples 66 (upper right):** Detective pointing to his upper left corner “toward” the Patreon logo,  
**Example 67 (upper left):** Detective pointing down “toward” the video description,  
**Example 68 (lower right):** Detective pointing at the camera,  
**Example 69 (lower left):** Detective waving at the camera



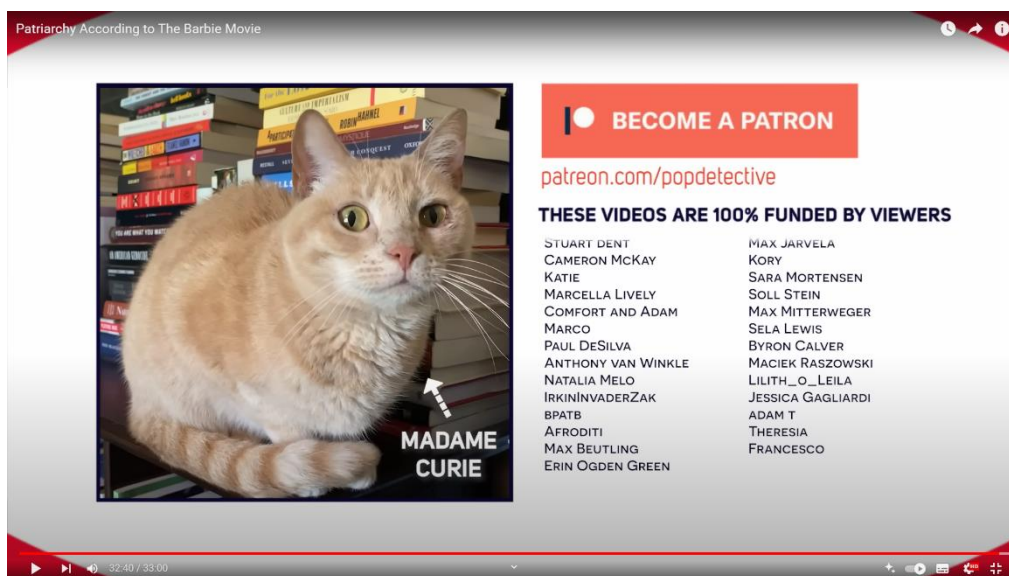
The video then cuts to a less steady, close-up shot of the cat, whose name as indicated on screen, is Madame Curie (Example 70, below). At 32:43, the red edges overtake the screen in an animated effect resembling an eye closing. The camera then zooms out, showing that the red the red square in the channel’s logo at the center of which is an eye, with the channel’s name written below it (Example 71, below). This can be linked to the animation Le does featuring her username and a clear visual of a cat, stage and doves, with the notable difference that Le places it at the beginning of the video while Detective places it at the end.

And finally, when it comes to Le’s concluding section, it is neatly separated into a chapter titled “conclusion”. She opens it by saying (40:20):

**Example 72:**

*Anyway, this is the end of the video. Thank you all so much for listening. Let me know what your thoughts are on subscription fatigue and what you think about like movies and TV shows that are being made today versus how they were made in like, you know, the DVD era, like the 90s. I’d love to know*

**Example 70: footage of Detective’s cat, Madame Curie**



**Example 71: Detective’s logo and username on a white background**



This contains the same segments mentioned previously: a thank you to the viewers for watching the video and an invitation to engage with the video by adding your own opinion in the comment section. The music in the background is calm and upbeat, and Le goes on a small unscripted tangent regarding films she has enjoyed recently, sharing another snippet of her personal life and taste before the end of the video.

She does reassess her stance in a way by saying: “I’d love to know, I do feel like there are some really good movies that have come out. Like I don’t wanna be like so doomsday about it.” This is however done in a less structured and more conversational way, perhaps to again engage with her audience in an informal way by making a joke about her attitude (“...don’t wanna be like so doomsday...”). This could also be to dispel the more structured and formal atmosphere present in the rest of the video, perhaps to present a casual “non-scripted” part of her personality. An argument for this is that she goes on to list certain movies she liked and being more “natural” in her speech, for example, she uses quite a lot of hedges, for example: “So I don’t know, like sometimes I feel like maybe...” instead of directly saying “Sometimes I feel like...”. To conclude the video, she says goodbye to the viewer and encourages them to keep engaging with her content (“I don’t know, as I said, let me know, but I hope you have a lovely rest of your day and I’ll see you next time. Bye.) and the final line in the video is one more mention of the video’s sponsor (“Thank you, ThredUp once again for sponsoring, build your dream closet for Less by shopping on ThredUp...”).

### 3.2 Influences from the written essay genre

As was stated earlier, genres are inherently intertextual and therefore intertextual and interdiscursive links are to be expected in the video essay as well. As the name suggests, the most obvious inter-genre connection to the YouTube video essay is the written essay. This is clearly shown in the structure of both. According to Redman and Maples (2017, p. 6-7) a basic (social science) essay consists of a title, introduction, main section/body, conclusion and finally a list of references.

The essay title, according to Redman and Maples (2017, p. 6) can be invented or in some cases it can be the question/statement for discussion given to students. Already there is a divergence between the two genres in terms of form, because while in a written essay the title is commonly written at the beginning of the text in bold on a plain page, as covered in the third chapter of this paper the YouTube platform offers different affordances such as the thumbnail image, with



the title and username either below it or on the right side from it (depending on whether the user is accessing the platform on their mobile phone or on their computer).

What follows the title in the written essay according is the Introduction, the section which informs the reader “what the essay is about” (Redman and Maples 2017, p. 6). The authors later go on to show how to write an introduction which acts “like an “abstract” or brief synopsis of the central points raised in the essay (p. 61). In the same page they go on to mention that many academic writers might begin their introductions with “an arresting quotation, image or challenging statement”, if not that then they may “start with a short discussion or an example or theme central to the matter in hand” as a way of introducing the questions relevant to their work.

In terms of form, Redman and Maples (2017, p. 61 - 62) suggest that the introduction should “account for between 5 and 10 percent of the overall word count”, although as they point out this “rule” is often bent. They further point out that in cases of essays longer than 1500 words, the introduction can be even a few paragraphs long and separated into its own section. However, for it to be full, it must identify the essay’s subject, “signpost the shape and content of the argument; highlight the major debates that lie “behind” the question; define term; and (sometimes) establish a position.”

The YouTube video essay includes this step also but with a few key divergences. In the video essays chosen as examples the introductions are of varying length. In Cappelle’s case the introduction is 1:51 minutes long while Detective’s is slightly longer, coming in at 2:49 minutes. Le’ introduction consists of two parts and is the longest taking up 5:22 minutes of the video. All three examples are very close, however to the recommended 10 percent.

Content-wise, there is a bit more divergence from the guidelines from Cappelle and Le. Cappelle as mentioned begins her video with a personal anecdote, while Le gives a short introduction of her channel and herself. In Le’s case there is also the short, animated clip accompanied by sound effects (shown in Examples 34 and 35), which would not be possible to include in a written essay. Detective on the other hand provides a more generic statement which is more in line with the traditional essay. In the case of both Detective and Le, however, what is included is a short montage of clips with various voiceover audio, which again, would not be

found in a traditional written essay, due to the affordances of the medium in which such an essay is written.

Following the montage is what Radman and Maples refer to as the “challenging statement”. This is used by all three creators, Cappelle for example says: “Now, if we all agree that social media are bad, why don’t we ban them?”. Detective and Le on the other hand employ multimodal tools to make their statements more impactful. Detective includes a clip of a news report with the man saying: “the word is used endlessly in the movie, even though most people, even me actually, have no real idea what patriarchy really means.” This statement is followed by a record scratch and a clip of the movie where everyone abruptly stops dancing and looks distraught. Over the movie clip Detective’s voiceover states: “that is a truly staggering level of defensiveness especially coming from people who don’t really seem to understand what the word even means.”.

Le says in her video: “Guys, we did cable TV dirty, I want you back, I’m sorry.” and also includes “arresting quotations” in the form of video clips: “Our very own independent streaming service, Watcher, for 5.99 a month.” and “... \$6, man, absolutely not!”. Le’s video is the only one where this statement is followed by a small section dedicated to the video’s sponsor “ThredUp”.

What follows is another example to highlight the topic of the essay, which is in accordance with Redman and Maples advice on writing an introduction. Le explains the controversial video (and the reactions to it) of the popular YouTube channel Watcher and gives context on the history of the channel and the people who run it. When talking about the negative reactions of fans at the prospect of having to pay for Watcher’s content she uses it as a way of introducing a key notion (which can be considered “identifying the subject” as Redman and Maples wrote) which is “subscription fatigue”. Using this, Le segways into a broader introduction by making a general statement shown below in Example 73.

**Example 73:**

*People are tired of having to pay for everything every single month. There’s only a finite amount of money the average person can shell out for these services.*

This is followed by what Redman and Maples refer to as “signpost the shape and content of the argument” when she says:

**Example 74:**

*So today I'm gonna be diving into subscription fatigue. We'll be covering the rise of Netflix, why movies and TV seem to suck today and the importance of owning content.*

This signposting is present in Cappelle and Detective's videos as well:

**Example 75:**

*First, I want to look at why is there such a gap between the way media platforms market social media as this great tool for connecting people and promoting democracy and the reality of it. Secondly, I want to talk about the implications of banning social media. And finally, we'll look at what's being done to provide what social media are supposed to provide.*

**Example 76:**

*While there are many legitimate criticisms of the Barbie movies feminism or lack thereof, this video essay is not going to address those questions, instead we're going to use the movie as a sort of primary to help explain what patriarchy actually is, what it isn't and how it ends up harming everyone including men.*

With this there is a shift to the main body of the video essay, but before examining it, the body of a traditional written essay should be described. The body or the main section of the essay is its most substantial part. In it the key points the writer/creator wishes to present are introduced in "logical progression". They are backed by evidence gathered from research and theoretical arguments (Redman and Maples, 2017, p. 6). Redman and Maples also write that in essays which have over 1500 words the main body may consist of up to five or six points (p. 72). In the structure of these sections there is a link with the suggested logical progression in essay writing suggested by Redman and Maples (ibid. p. 70), which consists of three parts: outlining the point of view, which is then elaborated and lastly given evidence in support of it.

Going over the video examples once more, Cappelle's main section begins at 1:53 and concludes it at 20:02, dividing it into three separate parts overall lasting about 18 minutes. Detective's main section lasts around 27 minutes, starting at 2:49 and ending at 30:51, which are divided into six parts. In Le's case she separates her essay into four parts before the conclusion, lasting from 5:22 to 40:21 minutes of the video, meaning it makes up thirty-five minutes of the video. Le, as mentioned in previous chapters, is the only one of the three authors to employ the chapters function offered by YouTube, which could be compared to a kind of index – showing viewers which topics are covered at which points in the video.

These parts do indeed follow the aforementioned logical progression of the written essay. Cappelle and Le introduce the current landscape of social media and streaming respectively, and endeavor to account for its origins. They address its negative consequences (Le) but also the negative consequences of them being removed while offering no alternative (Cappelle). The last section is concerned with the ways “everyday people”, meaning content creators on platforms such as YouTube or TikTok and their attempts to profit from their work outside of traditional broadcasting or streaming tactics. Detective on the other hand relies on his source to provide the structure of his video, the logical progression still being present with the beginning addressing the way patriarchy is treated in the media followed by explanations of the actual key tenants of the system accompanied by examples from the movie, ending with a critique of the movies portrays of certain topics.

The final part of the essay is the conclusion. Its purpose is to “reassess the arguments presented in the main section in order to make a final statement in answer to the question” (Redman and Maples, 2017, p. 7). Similar to the introduction it should not take up more than 10% of the essay and in longer essays it may include a statement regarding the possible abscess in the essay which may be amended in future works. It should however not include any new materials, ideas or arguments (ibid, p. 95-96). This is the section that, regarding the script/text, differs the most from the traditional essay.

The conclusions of all three videos are around two minutes long. Even in Cappelle’s, which is the shortest, this does not exceed the recommended 10%. Cappelle and Le announce their conclusion by saying: “So yeah, that’s it for today.” and “Anyway, this is the end of the video.”. They thank their viewers and encourage them to engage with them. While informal elements are present throughout the entire essay, and in Le’s case there are plenty of visual gags to accompany the scripted sections, in this section it is most prominent. This switching between registers instead of maintaining a formal one during the entire essay is another key difference between the two forms. This is echoed in the ending which includes them waving at the camera as they say goodbye. The very end of the video is dedicated to promotional content of the creators (in Cappelle’s case her Patreon) and the video’s sponsor.

In Detective’s video essay, the matter is slightly more complex, since his conclusion is divided into two parts. The first part maintains the same formal tone as the rest of the video. Offering final thoughts and key notes for the viewer. The second part of the conclusion as described in

the previous chapter is drastically different from the rest of his video however it contains much of the same as the other two. He thanks his viewers, encourages engagement and promotes his Patreon. He also says goodbye to his viewers.

The last section which follows the written essay itself is a list of references (Redman and Maples, 2017, p. 7). In the video essay, these may be included in the video essay itself in the form of text appearing on the screen (which may be connected to the in-text citations common in essays) and they may also be listed in the video's description. The video description, however, is another affordance of YouTube's platform which includes other sections, which wouldn't accompany a traditional essay. It is not a part of the essay itself, much like the title, due to the way the YouTube's website is set up, but it still contains elements such as a brief summary, a list of sources and credits to the people involved in the production (Examples 7-11)

To conclude, as the analysis of these video essays showed, there are clear similarities between the genre of the written and the YouTube video essay. However, the affordances of the medium in which the essays are produced and engaged with enables more multimodal strategies and allows for more interactive engagement with the discourse community surrounding the genre in the case of video essays.

## 4. Conclusion

This thesis dealt with the YouTube video essay as a discursive genre, with an aim to explore it from the perspective of discourse analysis and concepts of genre moves and discourse communities (Swales, 1987; Jones, 2019; Marwick and boyd, 2010). To achieve the goal, three representative YouTube videos, prominent in 2024, were selected.

By employing the tools and concepts of genre analysis (*genre moves, genre networks and discourse communities, affordances*) it was possible to identify the key moves, i.e. “building blocks” that make up the YouTube video essay a genre of its own.

Regarding the communicative purpose of the genre, its move structure, constraints and affordances, the analysis showed that the genre serves in to promote topics the creators deem socially important. They are unified by values of authenticity, transparency and a wish to promote critical engagement with mainstream media. YouTube’s website provides a framework for the information outside the video itself, the title, thumbnail and video description. All of which are utilized by expert members of this discourse community to attract other members by showcasing the message they wish to convey. The website does, however, impose upon its users’ values of engagement and a numeric valorization of their work.

However, the videos themselves are where the true values of the community shine through with an emphasis on authenticity, transparency and productive discussion and education. They are supported by a neat structure combined with a familiar tone. The most often used three-part structure is easy to navigate and the creators make their videos visually interesting and their message clear through a variety of multimodal tools.

Finally, it is evident from the structure as well as the way in which information and arguments are presented in the video essay that the genre derives its main influence from the genre of the written essay.

While this thesis demonstrated the key features of the YouTube video essay as a genre, there is still room for additional research. The genre contains exemplars which are significantly shorter and those which are significantly longer, which may contain additional moves or choose to sacrifice certain ones. The multimodal tools may differ as well, for example creators who choose not to reveal their face, may instead include an animated character to represent them. These creators then have a wider range of expressions to communicate with their viewers. Furthermore, there are aspects of the videos used in this analysis, which may warrant a deeper

investigation, for example the use of music and sound effects or the creators' body language, which were skimmed over briefly, since they fall outside of the scope of this thesis.

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