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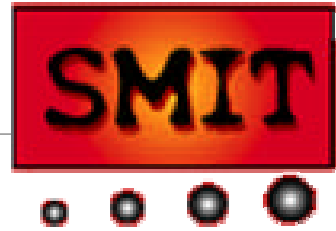
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Nico Carpentier[1]

The discourse on the digital divide is characterised by an emphasis on the notion of (equal) access to specific types of media technologies. Populations are divided into information haves and information have-nots and policies are oriented towards the stimulation of the adoption of these technologies. As such this discourse has become (and/or remains) a 'digital myth' (Frissen, 2000), which is predominantly media-centred and technology determined thus reducing the social complexity to the virtual binary. Although the digital divide discourse should be considered problematic at the empirical, conceptual, ideological and epistemological level, some elements of the digital divide discourse are worth saving, more specifically a broadened notion of access, and the emancipatory discourse of a struggle against social exclusion that lies hidden somewhere behind the discursive complexity of the digital divide discourse. This paper aims to return to these basic premises by broadening the scope and focusing on the abilities of ICT to stimulate access, interaction and participation. To provide empirical support for this (re)analysis and re-articulation, a case study on the British Video Nation project will be addressed in this paper. The original version of Video Nation was launched in the autumn of 1993 and ended in 2000, but this project has been turned into an 'online community and archive'. Video Nation is oriented towards representing the everyday but multilayered culture of 'ordinary people' and the cultural diversity within the British Nation. At the same time this project aims to maintain a balanced power relation between participants and members of the production team. The conclusion contains a plea for (further) stimulating the participatory attitude of media professionals at the micro, meso and macro level, focussing on the political, social, artistic and cultural dimensions that are interwoven with the everyday, on situating the audience within their communities and organisations and on drafting participants' rights. Secondly the project-oriented approach is placed on the foreground, as this organisational form allows for a more structural approach and creates more space for the integrated use of different available media platforms.

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1.   Introduction

This paper has two objectives. The first (theoretical) objective is to develop an analytical model for the analysis of the participatory nature of cultural products. Sources of inspiration are the models that have been developed in traditional media theory (and more specifically in the domain of participatory communication), and in new media and ICT[2] theory. Both approaches have an emphasis on access in common, but differ in their use of participation on the one hand, and interaction on the other hand. In this paper the different articulations of these three signifiers are outlined first, and then integrated in one analytical model.

The second ambition of this text is oriented towards the confrontation of the analytical model with a concrete cultural practice. This approach lines up with the basic principles of qualitative methodology, where the integration of theory building and testing in an iterative cycle is preferred (Wester, 1987; Maso, 1989; Wester 1995). The selection of this case study is not surprisingly legitimised by the way this always obstinate cultural reality finds its match in the constructed theoretical model. Video Nation is a BBC project that is characterised by a high level of participation and that can act as a 'case of good practice' (Carpentier et al. 2002: 59), as – formulated by the BBC's press service (1994) - '*people [can use cameras] to directly portray their own lives in their own terms.*' After a (relatively) long existence on television, this project now leads its life on the web[3], and connects to both the body of thought on participation (and traditional media theory) and the body of thought on interaction (and new media theory). This specificity enables a confrontation with both the participatory and interactive aspects of the developed analytical model. Moreover the Video Nation case study allows placing the inevitable presence of an ideological component in the cultural production and reception on the foreground. Following Althusser (1990: 25) we can posit that '*the representations of ideology thus consciously or unconsciously accompany all the acts of the individuals, all their activity, and all their relations [...].*' This necessarily includes the choices made by media professionals and the basic principles they draft, which cannot escape the ideological omnipresence.

2.   Developing the AIP-model

2.1.   Access and the digital divide discourse

The starting point of this analysis is the digital divide discourse. This choice is based on the importance that has been attributed to the signifier access[4] within this discourse, and the high profile of this discourse as such. Building on one of the key notions of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory, the role of access within the digital divide discourse can be defined as a nodal point. As a nodal point it creates the stability and fixity that every discourse needs to maintain its coherence. This stability is never complete, which is illustrated by the sometimes subtle differences in the used definitions on the digital divide. Rice (2002: 106) defines the digital divide for instance as the '*differential access to and use of the Internet according to gender, income, race and location.*' The definition used at the Digital Divide Network's website is again slightly different as the digital divide is seen here as the '*gap between those who can effectively use new information and communication tools, such as the Internet, and those who cannot.*' A similar but still different definition can be found

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[2] Information and Communication Technologies

[3] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation

[4] The centrality of the signifier access is well illustrated by the rather enormous amount of research aimed at documenting socio-demographically based differences in Internet access. Moreover, it should be noted that in this paper the focus is predominantly on Internet access, but the same points could be made for the much broader discussion on ICT access.

at the Digitaldivide.org website: here the digital divide is *'the gap between those able to benefit by digital technologies and those who are not.'* Yet another definition can be found in the *'bringing the nation on-line'*-report (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund & Benton Foundation, 2002: 4), where it is stated that '*recognizing that no one should be left behind in the information age,*

both the executive and legislative branches of the federal government […] have played important leadership roles in bridging the knowledge gap between the "information haves" and the "have-nots" — what some refer to as the digital divide.'

Figure 1: Cover page 'Bringing the nation online' report

This last report is (on the civilrights.org website) graphically illustrated by a collage of pictures, which include a smiling child with her hands on a pc and a group of people (differing in age, sex and ethnicity) gathered around another pc, signifying an orientation towards the future, community and cultural difference. Interestingly enough, no content is shown on the screens. The other two pictures are more oriented towards technology, as they show a motherboard and (severed) hands working on a laptop. As is argued in feminist theory the fragmentation of the body (Coward, 1978; Delhaye 1995) is related to the importance that is attributed to the bodily parts that are on display, in this case the hands as necessary operators of the technological equipment). In itself this collage of pictures already offers a clear visual condensation of the discourse of the digital divide.
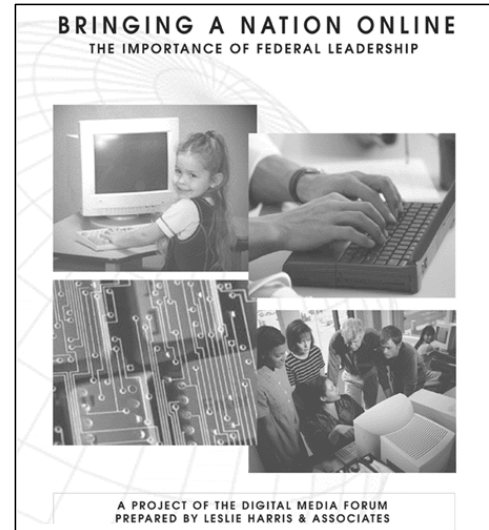
As most of the definitions above illustrate, the digital divide discourse is based on the articulation of three elements: 1/the importance of access to on-line computers, 2/which use results in increased levels of information, knowledge, communication or other types of socially valued benefits 3/that are in turn so vital that the absence of access and the resulting 'digibetism' (or computer illiteracy) will eventually create or maintain a dichotomous society of haves and have-nots.

When framing this discussion on the signifier access in the development of an analytical model, especially the critiques on the digital divide discourse become valuable. This specific articulation of the discourse of the digital divide, with access as its nodal point, tends to exclude a series of other relevant meanings. As is the case in any discourse, a specific set of elements is linked in a way that their identity is modified by the articulatory practice (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105). The discourse of the digital divide can be analysed, and in a way deconstructed, by focusing on the specificity of the articulation of the different elements that compose the discourse, and by focusing on what meanings and elements become excluded by these specific articulations. In this context, three lines of critique are discussed. Each line of critique struggles in a specific way against certain articulations and disarticulations and offers at the same time an enriching addition to the meaning(s) of access.

A first line of critique touches the very hart of the digital divide discourse, challenging the truth claim this discourse inherently carries, at the empirical, conceptual, ideological and epistemological level. More gentle criticisms are oriented towards the notion that a two-tiered division is not tenable. Van Dijk (1999: 155) pleads for replacing the 'gap' or 'divide' by a 'continuum'. Others point to the dynamic character of innovation and access to technologies, the role and specificity of early adopters (and im- or explicitly to Rogers' (1996) theory of the diffusion of innovation) in order to account for the reduction or reinterpretation of the

Figure2: BBC News Online (1999) – Special report: 'Bridging the digital divide'

'divide'. Frissen (2000) takes this position and refers (a bit less gently) to the '*myth of the digital gap*'.

An even more fundamental version of this (conceptual) critique is that the digital divide discourse articulates a dichotomy between information haves and information have-nots, between information rich and information poor or between those who use, benefit from or have access to the Internet and those who do not[5]. Not only does this dichotomy imply a static approach to technological innovation, but it also offers a structuring of the social on the basis of a technological criterion, both in explaining contemporary and future societies. Especially when the introduction and/or increased access to these '*technologies of freedom*' (de Sola Pool, 1983) is seen as the motor for social development, a technological deterministic ideology is seen in operation. Moreover at the epistemological level the foregrounding of (having access to) information forms again a specific articulation that is closely related to the more liberal approaches towards a free flow of information as a democratic practice. The fetishisation of information (to the detriment of knowledge) is based on a very mechanical approach to human learning and knowledge acquisition. One of the major reasons for this can be found in the lack of adequate philosophical reflection on the concepts of information and knowledge (Karvonen, 2001: 50). Stehr (1994: 92) argues here that especially the concept of knowledge has been treated as a black box. These different positions, that all question the truth claim of the digital divide discourse, allow for the articulation of access as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon, that includes both technological, social and cultural aspects.

A similar (re)articulation of access can be found in the second line of critique that builds on and extends the multi-dimensional nature of access. This line of critique is aimed against the reduction of access to 'physical access', foregrounding the materiality of access. Steyaert (2000 and 2002) for instance argues that '*psychical access*' (stressing the materiality of access) should be complemented with the different necessary skills required for the interaction with ICT (informacy). He distinguishes three levels of capabilities: instrumental, structural and strategic skills. Instrumental skills deal with the operational manipulation of technology, while structural skills relate to the use (and understanding) of the structure in which the information is contained. Strategic skills include the basic readiness to pre-actively look for information, information-based decision-making and scanning of the environment for relevant information (Steyaert, 2002: 73-74). This argument is complemented by the emphasis on user practices. As Silverstone (1999: 252) remarks on the domestication of ICT: '*The more recent history of home computing indicates that individuals in the household construct and affirm their own identities through their appropriation of the machine via processes of acceptance, resistance, and negotiation. What individuals do, and how they do it, depends on both cultural and material resources.*' A third broadening of the scope is performed when the focus is placed on both the relevance of on-line content and on the possibilities of feedback towards the content producing organisation (CPO). A first illustration of this position can be found in the definition of (media)access proposed at the 1977 Unesco-meeting in Belgrade, which has been reproduced in Servaes (1999: 85): '*access refers to the use of media for public service. It may be defined in terms of the opportunities available to the public to choose varied and relevant programs and to have a means of feedback to transmit its reactions and demands to production organisations.*' More specific content-oriented approaches focus on 'missing content' from a user perspective. The Children's partnership's (2000) analysis for instance points to the absence of content of interest to people with an underclass background, with low levels of literacy in English and with interests in local politics in culture, in other words: '*underserved Americans are seeking the following content on the Internet: practical information focusing on local community; information at a basic literacy level; material in multiple languages; information on ethnic and cultural interests; interfaces and content accessible to people with disabilities; easier searching; and coaches to guide them.*' When analysing the meaning(s) access is attributed within the digital divide discourse and the 'other' articulations and definitions of access discussed above, the following elements have become disarticulated from the digital divide discourse:

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[5] Users of these discursive elements often bracket them, signifying their unease with the signifier. Despite the implied conditionality, the signifiers are still articulated as described in the paper.

1/the possession of skills (and not only of equipment), 2/user practices, 3/relevant content and 4/feedback (and not only the mere use of the equipment).

A third line of critique attempts to decentre the digital divide discourse. A more modest attempt is oriented towards emphasising ICT-access of people with disabilities. The second and more important attempt to decentre the digital divide discourse is based on a more international perspective, and aims to de-westernise the digital divide. As Servaes (2000: xi) remarks in the introduction of '*Walking on the other side of the information highway*', many developing countries' governments have attributed a leading role to ICT-access in their strategies for economic growth and are being encouraged by the IMF and World bank to do so. The World Bank has for instance established GICT (the Global Information & Communication Technologies Department) in January 2000. Their 'mission and strategies'-text starts with the following sentences: '*Information and communication technologies (ICT) are opening new opportunities for developing economies. These opportunities will assist developing countries in bridging the digital divide through economic growth, increased jobs, and improved access to basic services. GICT was created to leverage the strengths of the World Bank Group in addressing these needs and taking advantage of these opportunities.*' (GICT: 2002) The involvement of these Western-oriented development agencies - still embedded in the paradigms of modernisation (Burgelman et al., 1999: 16) - nevertheless strongly nuance the claim of the de-westernisation of the digital divide discourse. The same specific articulations that characterise the Western digital divide discourse, can be found in many (but not all) of the more 'global' reorientations of this discourse. Due to these similarities the 'global' digital divide discourse remains vulnerable for the previously summarised lines of critique.

Finally another group of attempts to decentre the digital divide discourse are aimed towards a more political rearticulation of the divide. An example of this position is Gandy's (2002) article entitled '*the real digital divide: citizens versus consumers*', in which he sees '*the new media as widening the distinction between the citizen and the consumer.*' (Gandy, 2002: 448) The main concern here is that the 'new economy' will incorporate and thus foreclose the democratic possibilities of the new media (Kellner, 1999). The basis of analysis is provided by a distinction between a 'consumer' and a 'civic model' of network activity; the balance between both models will eventually determine the role of the Internet in post-industrial democracy. This political rearticulation of the divide offers major opportunities towards the inclusion of power and empowerment within this discourse, avoiding at the same time the technological deterministic, media centred, westernised and epistemologically biased position, and safeguarding the important notion of social exclusion. This rearticulation not only foregrounds citizenship, but it also implies the inclusion of yet another signifier in this debate, which has always (to a very high degree) complemented access: participation.

2.2.   Participation as a complement to access

In order to achieve this broadening of the scope, we now turn to the field of participatory communication (and the domain of traditional media) for inspiration, bearing in mind that access does not become completely discredited, but continues to play a crucial role, especially as a necessary condition for participation.

The following overview of the interpretation(s) of participation within the more traditional media is structured by Servaes' (1999: 84) thesis that the field of participatory communication is characterised by two points of view: Freire's dialogical pedagogy and the already mentioned Unesco-debates about access, participation and self-management in the seventies.

Despite Freire's focus on the educational process and the struggle against illiteracy and injustice, where the (mass)medial context is only minimally taken into account, Freire's theory has had a considerable impact within the domain of participatory communication. Thomas (1994: 51) describes this influence as follows: '*Although he never really linked his analysis to the use of particular media, it is implicit in his writings that communication, in order to be effective, has to be participatory, dialogic*

and reciprocal. In fact, the entire enterprise of participatory communication projects, from the organisation and production of community radio in Latin America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia, through the practices of popular theatre in countries like Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, South Africa, India, and the Philippines utilise Freire's perspective.' Freire's pedagogy of the hope is initially aimed against the traditional educational system, which he regards paternalistic and non-participative, since this system considers knowledge to be passed on as a readymade package instead of as the result of a dialogic meeting between subjects. In this fashion the educational system maintains and supports existing power imbalances. Freire aims to transform this system, allowing students (together with their teachers) to develop valid knowledge in a process of 'conscientisation'. '*Authentic participation would then enable the subjects involved in this dialogic encounter to unveil reality for themselves*' (Thomas, 1994: 51). Participation is in other words situated in a context of the reduction of power imbalances, both at the broad social, political and economic level (the relations between oppressors and repressed) and at the level of the educational system, where students and teachers strive for knowledge in a non-authoritative collaboration that fosters partnership.

The second point of view within the field of participatory communication has to be situated in the context of the Unesco-debates about a 'New World Information and Communication Order' (NWICO)[6] and a 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO). These debates, with the report of the 1977 Belgrade-meeting as transcript of this discussion, are among others oriented towards defining of the concepts access, participation and self-management. Servaes' (1999: 85) account of the definition of access has already been mentioned above. It stresses the available opportunities to choose relevant programs and to have a means of feedback. Participation and self-management are on the other hand defined as follows: '*participation implies a higher level of public involvement in communication systems. It includes the involvement of the public in the production process and also in the management and planning of communication systems. Participation may be no more than representation and consultation of the public in decision making. On the other hand, self-management is the most advanced form of participation. In this case, the public exercises the power of decision making within communication enterprises and is also fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans.*' (Servaes, 1999: 85)

In creating an overview, this discussion on participation and access in traditional media (See also Berrigan, 1977; Berrigan, 1979; Lewis, 1993; Servaes, 1999) can serve as a guideline. The table below gives an overview of the different types of access and participation that can be distinguished in relation to both the production and reception of meaning in relation to these traditional media.

Table 1: Access and participation

Production of meaning	**Reception of meaning**
Access to the content producing organisation (CPO) ✍ Ability to produce content and have it broadcast	*Access to the content considered relevant* ✍ Ability to receive and interpret content
Participation in the produced content ✍ Co-deciding on content	
Participation in the content producing organisation (CPO) ✍ Co-deciding on policy ✍ Evaluating the content	

At the level of reception the use of the concept of access refers to the ability to receive and interpret content, a capability closely related to mediating quasi-interactive aspects of the media discussed below.

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[6] Or also: '*New International Information Order*' (NIIO).

At the same level of reception, members of the audience can also often participate (to a limited degree) in evaluating the produced content. Already within some classic linear media models (for example DeFleur's (1966) model) the feedback-concept is used to theorise spontaneous audience reactions, like telephones or letters (later on also faxes and emails) to a specific programme or media professional. A more recent example of this is offered in the 'Crossroads'-research by Hobson (1982), in which a series of viewers' letters to the Birmingham Evening Mail – protesting against the announced death of one of the characters in this soap - are analyzed. More structural forms of this type of participation are evaluations performed by viewer's associations[7] and audience councils (Carpentier et al., 2002).

At the level of media production different practices of gaining access to the traditional media exist. Citizens can for instance address the (news)media individually or collectively (as being part of civil society). In spite of the structural bias that favours the access of so-called *'establishment sources'* (McNair, 1998: 76-77), agents varying from new (and old) social movements to local action committees can (try to) gain access to the (news)media, and can play an active – public - role.

When discussing participation at the level of production, it is firstly related to co-deciding on policy. Although this form of participation still remains rather rare in mainstream traditional media, in (some) community media it is considered proper practice. Prehn illustrates this as follows: *'participation [in community media] implies a wider range of activities related to involving people directly in station programming, administration and policy activities.'* (Prehn, 1991: 259) When it comes to co-deciding on content in the mainstream media, audience participation in the produced content has become more common. Audience participation in this sense means that members of the audience – sometimes extremely meticulously selected and managed - participate in for example talk shows, debates or (even) current affairs programmes and news broadcasts.

2.3.   Participation and em/power/ment

The above discussed approaches to participation might give the impression that the definition of participation goes uncontested. The opposite is the case, as for instance Pateman (1972: 1) remarks: '*the widespread use of the term [...] has tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared; "participation" is used to refer to a wide variety of different situations by different people*'. This widespread use (or the floating) of (the signifier) participation has prompted the construction of hierarchically ordered systems of meaning in which specific forms of participation are described as 'complete', 'real' and 'authentic', while other forms of participation are described as 'partial', 'fake' and 'pseudo'. As the illustrations below will show, the defining element of this categorisation is the degree to which power is equally distributed among the participants.

An example of the introduction of the difference between complete and partial participation can be found in Pateman's (1972) book 'Democratic theory and participation'. The two definitions of participation that she introduces are the definitions of 'partial' and 'full participation'. Partial participation is defined by her as: '*a process in which two or more parties <u>influence</u> each other in the making of decisions but the final <u>power</u> to decide rests with one party only*' (Pateman, 1972: 70), while full participation is seen as '*a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal <u>power</u> to determine the outcome of decisions.*' (Pateman, 1972: 71)

Other terms construct a hierarchically ordered system within the definitions of participation on the basis of the real-unreal dichotomy. In the field of the so-called political participation for example Verba (1961: 220-221) indicates the existence of 'pseudo-participation'*,* in which the emphasis is not on the creating of a situation in which participation is possible, but on the creating of the feeling that

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[7] The European viewer's associations are grouped in Euralva (http://www.vlv.org.uk/vlveuralvpg.htm).

participation is possible: '*participation has become a technique of persuasion rather than of decision*'. An alternative name which is among others used by Strauss (1998: 18) is 'manipulative participation'[8].

Also in the field of participatory communication this difference between real/true participation on the one hand and pseudo-participation on the other hand is acknowledged. White for example refers to a paper of Deshler and Sock (1985) who have analysed the literature on development and participation, in function of the applied basic concepts. In this context they introduce the difference between 'pseudo-participation' and 'genuine participation'. White (1994: 17) summarises the definitions used in this conference paper as follows, where (again) much weight is attributed to the presence of equal power relations: '*People's participation in development in which the <u>control</u> of the project and the decision-making <u>power</u> rests with the planners, administrators, and the community's elite is pseudo-participation. […] When the development bureaucracy, the local elite, and the people are working cooperatively throughout the decision-making process and when the people are <u>empowered to control</u> the action to be taken, only then can there be genuine participation*'. A second author working within the tradition of participatory communication that uses terms as 'genuine' and 'authentic participation' is Servaes. In 'Communication for development' (1999) he writes that this 'real' form of participation has to be seen as participation '*[that] directly addresses <u>power</u> and its distribution in society. It touches the very core of power relationships.*' (Servaes, 1999: 198) The concept of power is in other words again central to the definition of 'real' participation. White (1994: 17) also emphasises this central link between power and participation: '*it appears that <u>power</u> and <u>control</u> are pivotal subconcepts which contribute to both understanding the diversity of expectations and anticipated out-comes of people's participation.*'

2.4. Can interactivity/interaction save the day?

Although the (older) signifier participation is rather absent in the discourses on the new media, its place might have been taken by yet another signifier: interactivity/interaction. When talking about the new media, interaction[9] plays a significant role. In Rheingold's (1993) summary of new media consequences – supporting citizen activity in politics and power, increased interaction with diverse others and a new vocabulary and form of communication – interaction features prominently.

The use of this concept has been harshly contested and criticised. Manovich (2001: 55) problematises the newness and broadness of the concept. He firstly argues that interaction can be found at work in older cultural forms and media technologies, which makes the concept insufficient to provide the basis for theorising the difference between traditional and new media. Secondly he argues that interaction has been attributed too many meanings and/or a set of problematic meanings (leaving it often undefined or underdefined (McMillan, 2002: 164)). He refers to the '*myth of interactivity*', as its meaning becomes tautological when it is used in relation to computer-based media: '*Modern HCI [or Human-Computer Interaction] is by definition interactive. […] Therefore, to call computer media "interactive" is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic facts about computers.*' He also points to the danger of the interpretation of interaction as the physical interaction between a user and a media object, at the expense of psychological interaction: '*the psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis formation, recall, and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all, are mistakenly identified with an objectively existing structure of interactive links.*' (Manovich, 2001: 57) In order to theorise this reduction Penny (1995: 54) uses the word '*interpassivity*', meaning the '*Pavlovian interactivity of stimulus and response.*'

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[8] The well-known rhyme, which according to myth appeared sometime around the beginning of the seventies on a Paris wall, also takes advantage of this dichotomy between 'real' and 'fake' participation: '*Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent.*' (Verba & Nie, 1987: 0)

[9] As interactivity (again) refers more to a technological property and thus is closely connected to the digital divide discourse, the use of the broader concept interaction is preferred in this text.

For Manovich' first point on the lack of newness ample support can be found in traditional media studies, where the ritual, expressive, cultivating or mediating quasi-interactive aspects of the media have been emphasised for quite a long time (see respectively Carey, 1975; McQuail, 1994; Gerbner et al., 1979; Thompson, 1995). Among others Gerbner's cultivation theory (1979) can be classified here. The starting point of these models is the symbolic linkage that exists between media and audience, in which the interaction with and the active-ness of the audience is seen as a form of commitment and sharing of common values.

The second point on the broadness of the meaning(s) of the notion of interaction has only stimulated further inquiry and analysis. Many authors have in the meanwhile started to create an inventory of the different meanings of interaction. A first group has introduced a distinction between two broad types of interaction: person-to-person interaction and person-to-machine interaction (Carey, 1989; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Lee, 2000), while others have identified three levels of interaction. Szuprowicz' (1995) distinction between user-to-user, user-to-documents and user-to-system) is one of the more commonly used threefold categorisation systems.

As McMillan (2002: 166-167) remarks, the person-to-person or user-to-user interaction (or computer-mediated communication) finds its roots in human communication (and sociological) theory. Subjectivist sociologies as symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociology have highlighted the importance of social interaction in the construction of meaning through lived and intersubjective experiences embodied in language. In these sociologies the social (including the self – seen as a looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902)) is shaped by actors interacting on the basis of shared interests, purposes and values, or of common knowledges.

User-to-documents interaction can again be related to more traditional approaches towards mediated interaction, such as Horton and Wohl's (1956) account of parasocial interaction. More recently Thompson (1995: 84-85) has introduced the concept of quasi-interactive mediated communication[10] which he describes as follows: '*it is a structured situation in which some individuals are engaged primarily in producing symbolic forms for others who are not physically present, while others are involved primarily in receiving symbolic forms produced by others to whom they cannot respond, but with whom they can form bonds of friendship, affection and loyalty.*' In this structured situation interaction can be seen as the ways that active audiences interpret and use media messages. The approach to the human subject as an active carrier of meaning is already echoed in the development of Eco's (1965) aberrant decoding theory on the one hand, Hall's encoding/decoding model from 1973[11] and the concept of the active audience (Fiske, 1987) that emanated out of this model on the other hand. Also the uses and gratifications theory by (among others) Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) and the deduced models, as for example the expectancy-value theory of Palmgreen and Rayburn (1985) and the social action model of Renckstorf et al. (1996), rely to a large degree on the concept of the active audience (Livingstone, 1998: 238).

Finally user-to-system interaction is rather central to the new media, as it focuses on the human-computer relationship. Originally interaction was used to describe the more user-friendly interfaces that transcended the perceived limitations of batch processing. Later human-computer interaction (HCI) research focused '*analogous to reception studies [...] on the user-technology interaction, rather than the technology per se. It deals with usage of technology, or, to speak in discourse lingua, the pragmatics of technology.*' (Persson et al., 2000) McMillan's (2002: 174-175) model of user-to-system interaction offers four subsets:

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[10] He contrasts quasi-interactive mediated communication (which is monological and oriented towards an indefinite range of potential recipients) with face-to-face and mediated communication (which is dialogical and oriented towards specific others) (Thompson, 1995: 85).

[11] This article was first published in the form of a paper that was later on included in Hall's 1980 reader '*Culture, Media, Language. Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79*'.

? human-based interaction (e.g. users organising/manipulating data on the basis of their preferences),

? computer-based interaction (where information is presented to the user who makes the selection),

? adaptive communication (where computers are more adaptive to users' characterises, e.g. learning skills) and

? flow (where users 'loose themselves' in computer environments such as virtually reality systems and gaming environments).

McMillan's (2002) important contribution to this debate is that she very explicitly links all different types and (sub)models of interaction with questions of control (and power). Nevertheless the matter of control and power remains problematic, as the relationship between the user and his 'extension' is externally defined. Rokeby (1995: 148) for instance argues that interaction is about '*encounter rather than control*'. Later he continues: '*interactive media have the power to [...] expand the reach of our actions and decisions. We trade subjectivity [...] for the illusion of control; our control may appear absolute, but the domain of that control is externally defined. We are engaged, but exercise no power over the filtering language of interaction embedded in the interface.*' (Rokeby, 1995: 154)

This type of argument creates support for the idea that the (still partial) discursive replacement of participation by interaction has created an important void that leaves the 'microphysics of power' (Foucault, 1997: 42) and the power/knowledge relations too undertheorised and unchallenged. Interaction remains an important addition to the access-oriented digital divide discourse, but cannot suffice. A more innovative approach would be to combine access, interaction (or first order participation) and (second order) participation in order to achieve a broader perspective on the possibilities of both traditional and new media, and decisively correct the limitations of the digital divide discourse.

As table 2 illustrates this approach would allow for the introduction of an intermediary level between access and participation. This also allows for the integration of the elements that were emphasised in the different lines of critique towards the digital divide discourse. The inclusion of interaction would also allow clearing out some of the theoretical problems of the traditional access/participation division, which has firstly led to the overstraining of both categories. In this new model access is distinguished from the abilities to use and interpret content, while participation is now differentiated from ordinary feedback processes. Secondly the newness of the new media allows highlighting the importance and determining nature of technology. Traditional media technologies have been normalised, resulting in the theoretical neglect (or supposed irrelevance) of participation in the processes of their technological development. New approaches as can be found in 'participatory design' now explicitly theorise the importance of participation within the range of technological development[12]. The combination of access, interaction and participation results in the following table:

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[12] Access to and interaction with the technology producing organisation are omitted for convenience of overview. These processes are included in table 3.

Table 2: Access, interaction and participation (AIP-model)

Production of meaning	**Reception of meaning**
Access to the content producing organisation (CPO) ✍ Possession of equipment to produce content and have it broadcast	*Access to the content considered relevant* ✍ Ability to receive (relevant) content
User-to-technology interaction (U/T)	
✍ Ability (and skills) to use equipment to produce content	✍ Ability (and skills) to use equipment to receive content
User-to-user interaction (U/U) ✍ Creating content	*User-to-content interaction (U/C)* ✍ Ability (and skills) to interpret content
Participation in the produced content ✍ Co-deciding on (general) content	
Participation in the content producing organisation (CPO) ✍ Co-deciding on policy	*User-to-content producing organisation interaction (U/CPO)* ✍ Evaluating the content
Participation in the technology producing organisation (TPO) ✍ Co-deciding on technology	

2.5.   Expanding Hall's encoding/decoding model

When the categorisation in table 2 is elaborated by combining it with the communication process, Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model can be used to structure and schematise the concepts outlined in table 2. In the original encoding/decoding model, Hall theorises the distinction between the production and reception phase in order to attribute more weight to the reading or interpretation by the traditional 'receiver' or 'audience'. Both sides of the model draw upon on (potentially) different frameworks of knowledge, (potentially) different positions in/towards the relations of production and a (potentially) different 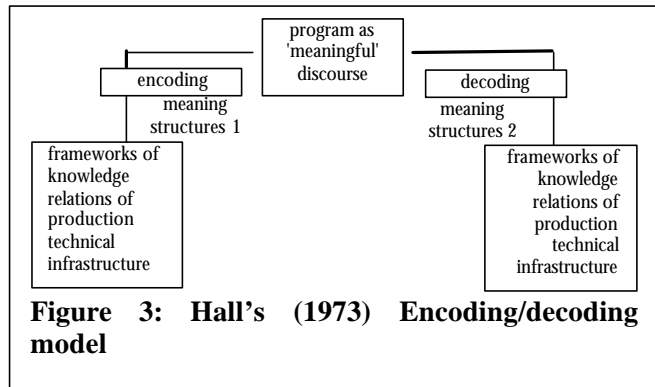use of the available technical infrastructure. The meaning of a program results from a series of negotiations, as a text is invested with meaning by its

Figure 3: Hall's (1973) Encoding/decoding model

encoders, and (potentially different) meaning(s) are attributed by its decoders. In the expanded model on the next page, the basic structure of this model is kept intact, except for a series of (minor) modifications. Firstly more emphasis is placed on individualising the encoder and the decoder, whilst at the same time (as a counterweight) the organisational context is made more explicit, both at the production and the reception side. Secondly the technological process is (graphically) separated from these encoders and decoders in order to facilitate the inclusion of the participatory processes related to technology. The actual expansion of the model consists in its linkage with the participatory processes of access, interaction and participation. This linkage remains limited as this expanded model only focuses on participatory processes that are related to the decoder and excludes the participatory processes that strictly involve the encoder (e.g. participation of the encoder in the TPO). In this expanded model the different types of access, interaction and participation are attributed to their specific phase(s) in the communicative process, grouping access to content, user/content-interaction and user/technology-interaction in one cluster. The second and third cluster group the access to the CPO, user/CPO-interaction and user/user-interaction at the one hand and the access to the TPO and user/TPO-interaction at the other hand. These two clusters do not only function independently, but are at the same time the prerequisites for the participation with (respectively) the CPO and the TPO.

Figure 4: Encoding/decoding AIP-model
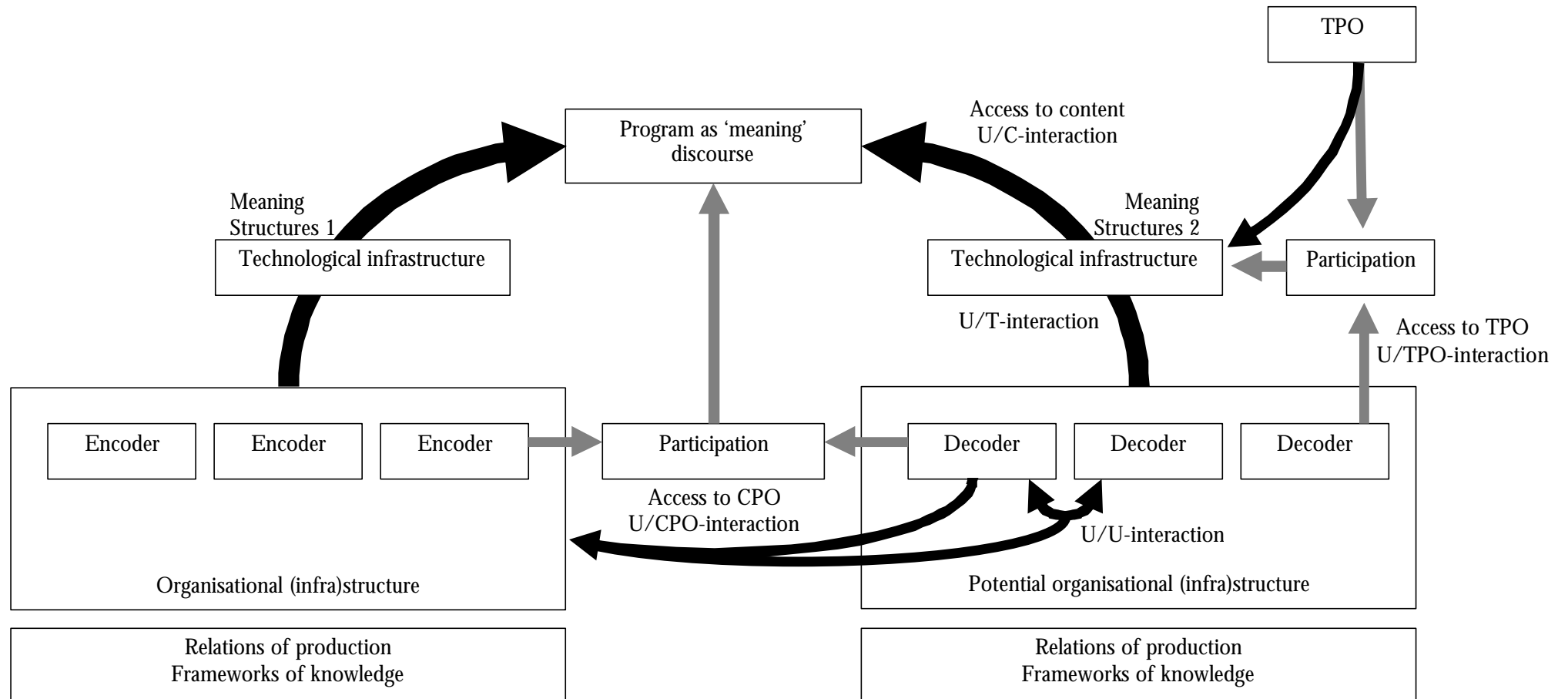
2.6. A brief conclusion of part 1

The digital divide discourse is considered problematic in many regards, because of its unilateral emphasis on access, and because of its specific articulation of the signifier access. A first line of critique challenges the truth claims of this discourse, on empirical, conceptual, ideological and epistemological grounds. The second line of critique shows that the specific articulation of access in the digital divide discourse results in the exclusion of user skills and practices, relevant content and opportunities for feedback. A third line of critique attempts to decentre, de-westernise and politicise the digital divide discourse.

Despite these different lines of critique some elements of the digital divide discourse are worth saving, more specifically a broadened notion of access, and the emancipatory discourse of a struggle against social exclusion that lies hidden somewhere behind the discursive complexity of the digital divide discourse. Although social exclusion cannot be reversed without tackling the factors that lead to inequality (following Wolf (1998) and many others) and '*inclusive politics of inclusion*' form a necessity, access to ICT remains one of the many tools to achieve this aim, but not without correcting the digital divide discourse.

This paper contains a strong plea to combine access with two other concepts that have played an important role in the field of discursivity that structures the relationship between people and media: participation and interaction. Both are signifiers that have had a long history in communication and social sciences, but one of them (participation) can only be rarely found in discourses on the new media. Arguably its strong emancipatory and potentially critical load - that was contested violently - resulted in the softening-up of its meaning. As an old floating signifier from the sixties and seventies - meaning everything and nothing for a long time – it became very vulnerable and is now threatened with a discursive replacement. The contrast with the other signifier (interaction) is extensive, as interaction became one of the buzzwords of the wonderful world of ICT, happily floating around (again meaning everything and nothing, but still being very new). Although interaction certainly has a discursive surplus-value and should play a role in theorising the relationship between people and media, this paper aims to come to the rescue of participation, as this concept directs the attention – more than interaction can – to the power/knowledge relations that still decisively characterise traditional and new media.

3. Video Nation

3.1. A brief history of Video Nation

The Video Nation project starts in 1992, when the then controller[13] Yentob gives his approval to the project. Crucial and unusual is that this approval does not concern a programme proposal but the proposal for a project that aims to provide material to a diversity of programmes that had not been developed yet.

The basic concept is to provide camcorders to a semi-representative selection of 'the audience', to train these (about) 50 people and to ask them to film fragments of their daily life. One of the co-producers summarises their ambition as follows: '*the aim was an anthropology of Britain in the Nineties seen through the eyes of the people themselves.*' (Rose, 1999: 174)

Inspiration for this project is found in two diverging sites: the work of the so-called Mass Observation Movement and the work of the BBC Community Programmes Unit (and their predecessors). Mass-Obs was founded in 1937 by poet and film maker Jennings, anthropologist Harrison and journalist Madge to create an '*anthropology of ourselves*'. ('A brief history', 2001) Mass-Obs recruited observers and volunteer writers to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain. They used a variety of methods to gather information: surveys, interviews, diaries and personal reports from the volunteer writers. The original Mass-Obs existed until the early '50, but was revived in 1970 by the British University of Sussex[14], that still houses the archive. The second source of inspiration – the BBC Community Programmes Unit – started its operations in 1973 and slowly and silently disintegrated at the end of the '90. The foundation of the CPU is related to the earlier work of Late Night Line Up, a BBC programme that was broadcast from 1964 until 1972, and that featured (among many other documentaries) in 1971 the Guinness Workers Film. This documentary contained harsh criticisms on the paternalistic attitude of the BBC towards ordinary people from the mouth of a number of Guinness workers and played a crucial role in the establishment of the CPU (Harvey, 2000: 164). According to Harvey (2000: 165) the first two decennia of the CPU were characterised by what she calls '*a continuing process of mediation either by a professional programme team, or by campaigners and service providers who where, in some cases, at something of a distance from the subjects […] or clients.*' Flag ships of this approach were the programmes Open Door (1973) and the successor Open Space (1983). Only in 1991 - when the Video Diaries (Video Nation's direct predecessor) start - a new approach was chosen. Video Diaries consisted out of one hour documentaries that were autobiographical and subjective, addressed the viewer directly – using the first person mode - and were made by non-professionals through the use of lightweight cameras. The first Video Diary for instance featured a football fan during the World cup soccer. The production process was oriented towards handing over control to the non-professional author of the diary and was based on a partnership between the producer and the author. The documentaries were for instance edited in the presence of the author (to the degree of his/her wish) and the final editorial decisions remained firmly in the hands of the author.

In the press communiqué that announces the start of Video Nation explicit reference is made to both Mass-Obs and Video Diaries. In this text, one of the co-producers is quoted saying: '*Our contributors are the 1990s equivalent of the original panel of volunteers. The difference is that instead of writing they use up-to-the-minute camcorder technology to keep a daily record of their lives.*' (BBC Press Service, 1994: 3) A few lines later, the executive producer Bob Long is also quoted: '*While video diaries inspired us all about the potential of camcorders for getting fresh voices on to television, it took some time to develop the support needed for the large group involved in Video Nation. We now have that in place and are very exited about the results.*' (BBC Press Service, 1994: 4).

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[13] So-called 'channel controllers' are responsible for long-term strategy and vision.
[14] http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/massobs/

To introduce the first documentary that results out of the Video Nation project (Money, Money, Money - 13 March 1994) a series of 10 trailers are commissioned and broadcast. The programme slot for these very short programmes (just before the current affairs programme Newsnight) already existed on BBC2, and had been used for programmes like A picture of Rembrandt and Sarajevo: a street under siege[15]. The first of these so-called Video Nation Shorts – Mirror made by the retired colonel Gordon Hensher[16] - is broadcast on 7 March 1994 and goes as follows:

Figure 5: The first short: Mirror by G. Hensher

"M-I-R-R-O-R, mirror.
There was a time then they were very useful, still are of course, I have to use them.
But it's a ghastly thing to look and see your face, what it is now, and what you feel it should be inside you.
One doesn't feel old, you know.
You get to, I don't know what the age is, 30 or 40, and after that time you don't feel any older, but every time you look in that confounded mirror and see what time has done and age has done to your face, your body, your hands, everything – that's what I dislike more than anything."

After the broadcast of Money, Money, Money the then controller Jackson will commission another 10 Shorts, followed by a new commission for several months of Shorts, to end with allocating a permanent slot for the Shorts. After 1994, the weekly output (for 40 weeks a year) of the Video Nation project will consist out of five Shorts, which are in most cases broadcast before Newsnight on BBC2. During the six years of their existence on television, more than 1200 of these *'mini-portraits'* or *'windows on the people's worlds'* (Interview[17] Chris Mohr – 12/8/2002) are produced.

The yearly production will also consist of three hours of (longer) documentaries (Rose, 2000: 176). Some of these documentaries focus on the daily life in relation to the nation (Nation Weekly, One Day in Scotland, One day in Africa and Nation goes to the polls), while other documentaries use a more thematic approach, as belief in Life, Death, God and Everything; spare time in State of Play; work in On the Job; television in On tv; housekeeping in Coming Clean and food in Bitesize Britain. Finally a number of compilations are produced, such as Nine Lives, the Reviews of the Year[18] and the UNCUT-series. Added together this project has resulted in more than 60 hours of broadcast time and more than 10000 hours of raw material, made by more than 300 participants (BBC, 1999).

During and after its existence, television versions of Video Nation were broadcast in a number of other countries. National broadcasters in Denmark and Israel have collaborated with BBC to develop *'home-grown versions of the original product.'* (feedback Chris Mohr – 6/11/2002) The Belgian programme Barometer, broadcast on TV1 in 2002 by the VRT, has also been inspired by BBC's Video Nation. In

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[15] In A picture of Rembrandt one work of Rembrandt was discussed by an off-screen voice. Only at the end of the programme the identity of this voice was revealed. In Sarajevo: a street under siege the daily life in this city was portrayed.

[16] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/people/gordonhencher.shtml

[17] In addition to the illustrative use of the Shorts that can be found at the national Video Nation website, this case study also draws on interviews with the producers of the project (Bob Long, Chris Mohr en Mandy Rose – especially Chris Mohr (and to a lesser degree Mandy Rose) is still involved in the web-based version of Video Nation). Chris Mohr read a draft version of this text and formulated a series of remarks and additions, a method which is to be defined as a form of respondent validation (or feedback analysis). Other data used in the analysis were a selection of the Video Nation press archive (that is being kept in the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham) and a selection of the video log files (selected on the basis of the presence of the keyword 'evaluation') that (together with the raw material) is being kept at the British Film Institute (BFI). Both archives were consulted on 14/08/2002.
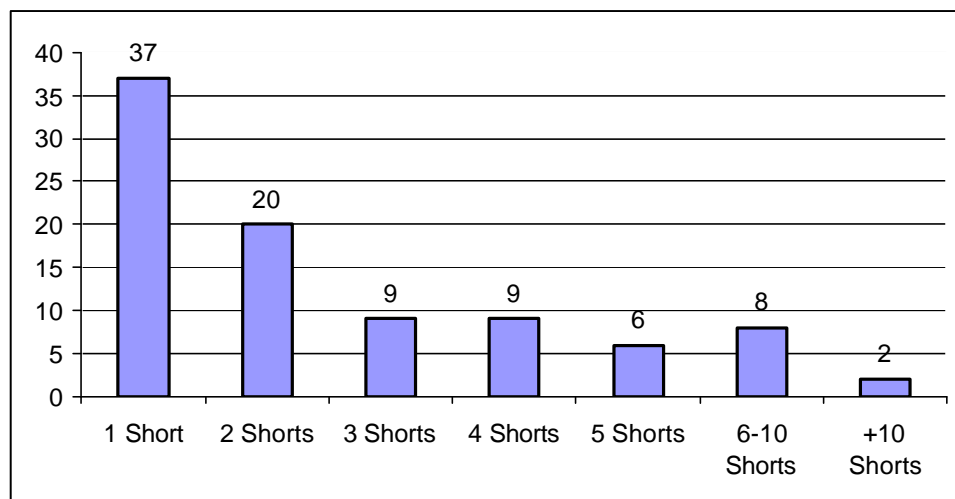
[18] The reviews of the year were hosted by a Video Nation participant.

addition the British World Service Trust[19] has produced a series of Ukrainian and Russian audio diaries, which were grouped in the Millennium archive. A description of this archive can be found at the BBC World Service Trust website:

> '*Recorded without the aid of journalists, men and women of various ages tell their everyday stories of life – passing on to listeners their extraordinary qualities and richness of experience. The diaries pay particular attention to disadvantaged sections of society – to include the testament of trafficked women, soldiers, prisoners, the disabled, the elderly and housewives.*' (BBC World Service Trust, 2002)

Ironically, the first phase of the Video Nation project ends in May 2000 because of the (position of the) Shorts. Their place in the programme schedule is claimed by the new BBC2-controller Jane Root, for a more tight scheduling in order '*to hold viewers*' (McCann, 1999). The web-based existence of the Shorts starts relatively inconspicuously in a number of collaborations with other projects, such as BBC's language education 'Learning English'[20] and the anti-tobacco campaign 'Kick the Habit'[21], without resulting in a real revival of the project. This only happens in the middle of 2001 when BBC Online discovers the potential of the Shorts: '*The Shorts library provided a unique source of (relatively) cheap and copyright-free video content ideal for broadband to demonstrate its potential. It was already cut into hundreds of segments whose duration and personal nature were perfect for the web.*' (Feedback Chris Mohr, 6/11/2002). This discovery leads to the launch of the BBC Video Nation website as '*online community and archive*' in November 2001, still referring to the same basic ambitions: '*It's about handing over the agenda to members of the public, encouraging them to record what they think is important. The aim is to reflect everyday life across the UK in all its rich diversity.*' (BBC Video Nation, 2002). The national website contains an archive of 250[22] (already televised) Shorts, made by 91 different participants, and a limited number of new Shorts[23] (in this text all are referred to as Webshorts). The graph below shows the number of archived Webshorts per participant.

Figure 6: Number of archived Webshorts per participant

Moreover, the national website is linked to a number of local BBC-websites (which are part of the Where I live-project[24]). On these local websites (and only there) new participants can '*[put their] views and experiences on camera and share them with the whole community.*' (BBC Video Nation Liverpool, 2002) At this point in time four of these local websites are actively involved in the Video Nation project (Humber, Leicester, Liverpool en London[25]), but it is planned to increase this number up to 40 or 45. Another option under consideration is to start broadcasting the Webshorts in collaboration with BBC's local radio stations and regional television stations (Interview Chris Mohr – 12/8/2002).

Figure 7: The Video Nation website
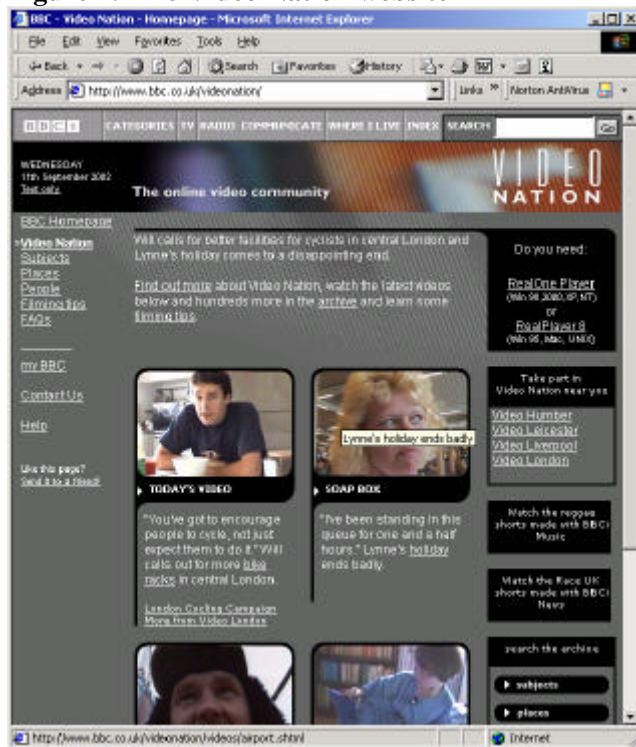
At the moment the London website contains 18 Webshorts of 11 different participants, while Leicester has seven Webshorts of five participants and Liverpool seven Webshorts of seven participants. The Humber website contains a larger number of "Webshorts" (160 made by eight participants) but this is to be explained by the use of a different production format which is only vaguely related to the Video Nation project (Interview Chris Mohr – 26/9/2002). The emphasis of the analysis of the Webshorts is placed mainly (but not exclusively) at the national level.

In comparison to the original television-based existence of the Video Nation Shorts, a series of differences have arisen. It should be noted first that the basic principles of the Video Nation project have been left intact. The differences should be partially attributed to the nature of the medium (and the way this medium is being used): the televised shorts were (in normal circumstances) broadcast only once, aimed at a large audience[26], offering only a limited amount of contextual information[27]. These Shorts formed an interruption (or transformation) of the 'ordinary' or 'normal' programming,

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[24] http://www.bbc.co.uk/whereilive/

[25] Humber: http://www.bbc.co.uk/humber/videohumber/introduction.shtml,

Leicester: http://www.bbc.co.uk/leicester/video_leicester/index.shtml,

Liverpool: http://www.bbc.co.uk/liverpool/videonation/ en

London: http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/yourlondon/videolondon/video_london.shtml

[26] Viewing rates range from 500.000 up to 9.000.000 viewers, and were very dependant upon the programmes that were scheduled before and after the Shorts (Interview Chris Mohr – 26/9/2002).

[27] The Shorts traditionally started with the title of the Short, the name of the author and in some cases his/her place of residence. No credits appeared at the end of the Shorts, so no reference was made to the production team. The BBC-announcers were requested not to make any reference to the Shorts' contents.

and for this reason the effect of surprise was maximised: '*You never knew what and who to expect. And then someone would pop up and for two minutes you would be in their world.*' (Interview Chris Mohr – 12/8/2002) In the case of the archived Webshorts the viewing experience changes, as the WWW is more of a lean-forward than a lean-backward medium. Moreover the website offers a multitude of images, not just one interruption of the televisional flow, in combination with a (still concise) summary, the name of the author and his/her place of residence. The structure of the website allows ordering the Shorts according to their topic, author and region, which implies more contextual information and allows for the potential construction of connections between the Shorts. In the table below the system of topic-wise classification has been reproduced, and the map gives an overview of the regional classification system. In both cases the number of Webshorts has been added for each (thematic and regional) category.

Table 3: Thematic classification system

Age	22	Crime	5	Humour	24	Sadness	16
Anger	21	Death	17	Identity	31	School	8
Animals	16	Disability	7	Leisure	33	Seasons	13
Belief	20	Excitement	15	Memories	27	Sport	7
Birth	17	Fears	8	Money	10	Students	6
Body	26	Food	8	Music	9	Teens	27
Celebrations	17	Happiness	18	Nature	16	Transport	10
Childhood	23	Health	13	Parenting	32	Values	10
Community	17	Holidays	19	Pets	12	Work	25
Countryside	14	Home	23	Relationships	30	None	1

Figure 8: Regional classification system[28]

North West: 23	Scotland: 24
N. Ireland: 24	North: 28
West midlands: 4+3+5	North East: 17
Wales: 15	East midlands: 10+3
West: 8+5	East: 2
South West: 10	London: 36
South: 32+2	South East: 16+2
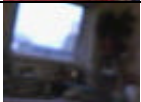
The structure in which the Webshorts are embedded also allows the creation of an overview of the course of life of some of the participants that have been involved for a longer period of time. In the example below four Webshorts by Jean Lee[29] are reproduced: the first report on a positive pregnancy test, the second shows her in advanced state of pregnancy, in the third Webshort her son Tommy has just been born and in the fourth Webshort has Tommy thrown the camera on the floor.

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[28] In a number of cases the participants are attributed to more than one region. These Webshorts are included after the plus-sign.

[29] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/people/jeanlee.shtml

Figure 9: Four webshorts by Jean and Tommy Lee

	PREDICTOR: Jean is hopeful
	BUMP: Jean's baby is nearly due
	LABOUR: Jean is overwhelmed
	VIDEONATION: Jean's had a unique experience

Next to these medium-related changes, a number of changes were implemented in the production process. In the first (television) phase a (more or less) stable group of 50 people were selected and trained. They could use the cameras for one year, on the condition that they would send in 90 minutes every fortnight. This procedure allowed the participants (the time) to develop their own filmic language. The Webshorts are made by participants that can only have the cameras at their disposal for a limited amount of time. These changes are illustrated by the presence of training-Shorts (in the 'filming tips' area), that were made by some of the more experienced participants. These Shorts intend to give new and potential participants a (modest) overview of the Video Nation filming style[30], which not only renders the training partially public and simplifies it, but illustrates at the same time the simplicity of the training method. In the example below one of the participants shows how easy it is to film an improvised travel-shot.

Figure 10: VN-website graphical element

Figure 11: A training-Short: Hollywood by C. Gorner

3.2. Video Nation's basic principles

The Video Nation project is characterised by three basic principles that have in a high degree determined the outcome of the project. Firstly, the emphasis is placed on the everyday lived culture of 'ordinary people'. Secondly, this project aspires to signify the diversity of the contemporary British society. Finally the material originates from a partnership between the production team and participants, where the participants are granted more control on the production process and outcome than is common practice in the media system.

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[30] The training-Shorts are also made available to potential participants on VHS (Interview Chris Mohr – 26/9/2002).

The emphasis on the everyday culture of 'ordinary people' is already present in Video Nation's first press communiqué, where it is pointed out that '*all 55 [...] will be asked to focus on subjects of personal relevance such as family relationships and cultural identity, as well as those of public concern such as unemployment, racism and law and order. By asking them to film everyday events, like eating breakfast, shopping, or having a night out, the project will explore a wide range of contemporary issues in a personal, highly immediate way.*' (BBC Press Service, 1994: 2) Rose (2000: 181) describes how potential participants refer in the first (introductory) conversations to the feeling of misrepresentation (or 'under'-representation) in the traditional media: '*I think that they were also saying that they did not see the texture of everyday life reflected. [...] These recordings detail the mundane stuff that is the essence of everyday life.*' In a previous article she gives a description of the first tapes that are handed in: '*The tapes are full of peculiarly intimate detail, often overflowing with extraordinary tenderness. What I think is perhaps the most interesting about the projects is that it allows the contributors to emerge as complex people.*' (Rose, 1995: 10) Building on de Certeau's work, Video Nation is not only a validation of the everyday, the repetitive, the un-purposeful and the heterogeneous, but contains also elements that signify the sublime and the aesthetical of everyday life. As Parret (1996: 74 – my translation) formulates it: '*the everyday shows fissures: privileged moments of intense aesthetic experience.*'

Through this process the constructed and complex nature of the distinction between the everyday 'centre' and the privileged 'margin', and between 'ordinary people' and the 'elite' surfaces. The members of the Video Nation production team do not escape from the hybridity of the everyday, as they themselves aim to contribute to its 'aesthetisation' by applying a series of criteria in order to make 'good television'. This type of analysis circulates internally (within the production team), and can be summarised by the statement (on the basis of their on-going self-evaluation) that there are not enough 'bad people' in Video Nation. It is also sharply expressed by Morrison (2000: 50): '*The point I am making here is that VNS is part of a larger political project and this does have repercussions in terms of the construction of "ordinary" and "everyday". Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, snobbery – the things that divide us – do not feature in this version of British society. In VHS, I feel, the everyday operates as a mythic realm in which 'ordinary people' are equated with 'the people', holding out the promise of national community.*'

Especially at the level of the articulation of the signifier 'ordinary people' the Video Nation production team finds itself in an uncomfortable position. An example of this position can be found in the following quote from assistant-producer Newby (1994: 11) in the BBC's house magazine Ariel: '*Although there are probably no such things as "ordinary people", that's what Video Nation was to be about.*' In this regard it is significant that the executive producer of Video Nation – when asked – defines 'ordinary people' as non-media professionals (Interview Bob Long - 22/08/2002). This definition contrasts with a more class-based articulation, where 'ordinary people' are defined in an antagonistic relationship with the elite (see Laclau, 1977; Hall, 1981; Fiske, 1993). This decision has its repercussions on the composition of the group of participants, as is illustrated by the description of the first group: '*Video Nation participants range from a fisherman in the Western Highlands to a Bosnian refugee in Birmingham, from a peer of the realm to a serving Army corporal and from a City investment banker to an eco-traveller on the move.*' (BBC Press Service, 1994) Another illustration can be found in the presence of members of the British aristocracy. An example is the Webshort of the count of Devonshire[31] who talks about his love for horseracing and for *his* horses.

The used articulation of 'ordinary people' naturally still implies the inclusion of people that do not belong to one of the many societal elites. Within this multitude of cultures on display, there is also room for popular culture, subculture or anti-culture, and for identity politics and citizenship. The starting point of this argument is the distinction between politics and the political. While politics refers to the political system, the political is the organisation of social reality. '*The political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition.*' (Mouffe 1997: 3) This also implies that citizenship cannot be restricted to the traditional Marshallian model of civil, political and social citizenship (Marshall, 1992/1950; see also Dahlgren, 1995: 146), but needs to be understood as a form of identity.

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[31] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/people/dukeofdevonshire.shtml

This implies the inclusion of the notion of cultural citizenship, which focuses on the sharing the political through the '*communicational exchange of ideas of selfhood and citizenship, rights and differences*'. (Hartley, 1999: 162) It implies - as Hermes (1998: 159) puts it – the redefinition of citizenship as '*sets (plural) of different and sometimes overlapping communities that constitute individuals as competent members of sets of different and sometimes overlapping communities […] which should ideally constitute the national (political) culture*'. In this approach the civic and cultural education that for instance television has to offer within an environment loaded with commercial entertainment is highlighted. Hartley (1999) refers to this phenomenon as '*democratainment*'.

In a second approach de Certeau's perspective, when he describes the tactics of daily life that bypass, pervert or undermine political, economic and scientific strategies, can be used. These tactics are the '*victories of the "weak" over the "strong" (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, "hunter cunning," manoeuvres, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.*' (de Certeau, 1988: xix). This approach allows placing more emphasis on the micro-physics of power.

Taking these broadly defined political and emancipatory perspectives as starting points, the Shorts cannot be seen in isolation from the political domain. In Dovey's (2000: 128) analysis of a number of Webshorts, the political (and public) dimension is explicitly put on the foreground: '*[…] many of the programmes offer us private perspectives on obviously public themes.*' Later he goes more in detail: '*The content of the Video Nation pieces constructs a public address in three ways, either by offering individual perspectives on public 'issues of the day', or by presenting work in which subjects explicitly discuss the relationship between their private an public selves or by a more traditionally humanist appeal to a general sense of shared experiences such as ageing or childbirth.*' (Dovey, 2000: 129)

In some cases the political load is manifest, and the tactics of daily life are oriented against the political system, as is the case in one of the Shorts where a participant ostentatiously tears up her membership card of the British conservative party. The citizenship seen at work in this Short has both political and cultural characteristics. In another case the presence of this political load is more subtle, and the Shorts become carriers of identity politics and cultural citizenship. An example is the Webshort Daffodils by Connie Mark, who first recites two strophes from a poem by Wordsworth, followed by one strophe from a poem by Herrick[32], while she portrays fields filled with daffodils. She firstly shows to have the cultural capacity to know these poems. Again, this illustrates the interwovenness of the everyday and the sublime (in this case poetry). She also takes a position in the discussion on (post)colonial relations on the basis of her lived experience. Her narration and visualisation clearly identify her as a member of a black community. The poems are followed by stating (with still some bewilderment in her voice) that she was thought these poems by her British teachers in a school in Jamaica, without ever having seen daffodils.

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[32] The English poet William Wordsworth lived from 1770 until 1850; Robert Herrick, poet and clergyman, lived from 1591 until 1674.

Figure 12: Culture and (post)colonialism: Daffodils by C. Mark

"I remember when I was a child, I had to do this in school: poems about daffodils:

'*I wandered lonely as a cloud*
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine And
twinkle on the milky way,

They stretched in never-ending line
Across the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance ...'

Having those and other wonders said:

'*Fair daffadils, we weep to see*
You haste away so soone;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attained its noone.'

The amazing thing is I never ever saw a daffodil in Jamaica, but because our teachers were all British, we have the learn English poems, and British history and British geography."

The second basic principle relates to the representation of the cultural diversity that characterises the United Kingdom. One of the former directors of BBC formulates this point in a speech as follows: '*Video Nation treats the tapestry of individuals and cultures that make up the United Kingdom with dignity and respect.*' Birt (1999: 13) A similar position is formulated by one of the co-producers: '*The BBC needed to find new ways of reflecting the wide range of views, attitudes and lifestyles that were out there and the Video Nation project was one way of doing that.*' (Rose, 2000: 177) The emphasis on diversity is symbolised by the introduction of the Televisionshorts, which is represented below (in a slightly different format). This introduction consists out of a collage of television screens, which each feature one participant and together show the multitude of faces of the Video Nation.

Figure 13: Video Nation promotion-postcard

The objective to guarantee cultural diversity is supported by the clear intention of the members of the production team to avoid stereotyping. As the following quote from one of the co-producers illustrates, this choice also comprises a critique towards the functioning of traditional media: '*Factual television tends to represent people as two dimensional, "casting" them in limited, often stereotyped roles. The unemployed is called on to represent unemployment. The black British person gets to contribute when racism is the issue. The gay person is called on to take a position about sexuality. As Video Nation contributors those same people can record any aspect of life.*' (Rose, 2000: 181) An example is one of the Webshorts of Jo Ann Batemann[33], which deals with the argument between a mother and daughter about the daughter's hair colour. Jo Ann Batemann, whose hair-style is itself related to punk culture, tries to convince her 12-year old daughter – as sometimes parents have to – that purple hair will not be accepted by her school and will damage her hair.

Figure 14: Education and stereotypes: Purple by J. A. Bateman

Video Nation links the ambition to represent cultural diversity with an appeal for societal unity and nationhood. The two co-producers describe their position in an article in The Independent: '*In a mass society that's quite fragmented, we need to be confronted with one another's similarities as well as our differences; and we desperately need the differences to be humanised.*' (Rose & Mohr, 1999) This appeal for national unity, based on the above mentioned similarities and differences, or on transcending diversity in order to support national unity, can be found in Video Nation in many ways. When starting the project representativeness and diversity are combined in a well considered selection strategy. On the one hand, a general call is launched using BBC radio and television. This results in 7000 reactions, of which about 3500 candidates will send in the requested form. Of these 3500 people about 200 are visited by a member of the production team. About half of the first participant group is selected in this manner. On the other hand '*pro-active research*' was used to reach candidates from target groups that have proven difficult to contact (and mobilise) through the use of general appeals

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[33] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/people/joannbateman.shtml

(Interview Chris Mohr – 12/8/2002). These techniques of production research consisted out of: '*exploring personal contacts, plugging into local networks, going on research trips to certain localities, leafletting estates, posting ads in local shops, addressing community groups/schools/etc, talking to people in pubs and playgrounds, using gatekeepers to access individuals, reading and placing ads/interviews in local and ethnic press and BBC local radio etc. etc. etc. etc.*' (Feedback Chris Mohr – 6/11/2002) The above quoted Jean Lee was for instance recruited via an add in a Chinese-British magazine. In the first phase the production team aims for traditional socio-demographic representativeness and an equal distribution of participants on the basis of characteristics as age, place of residence and income. (Mohr, 2000: 183)

In order to optimise the diversity of the participant group this ambition is abandoned in a second selection phase, when the production team explicitly scout for participants that belong to specific societal groups or that represent specific positions (content-wise). The four local websites apply a similar combination of a general call and pro-active research (Interview Chris Mohr – 26/09/2002), with the one difference that the general call is now permanently on-line. Below the London example:

> ***Do you want to get involved?***
>
> *Send us an email, and say (in not more than 50 words) why you think you'd be a good subject for Video London.*
> yourlondon@bbc.co.uk

Figure 15: VN-website fragment

The nation is not only constructed by grouping the contributions of different participants in a series of televised Shorts, and later in the archive, but also by the way the participants (and the production team) handle the medium when producing the Shorts. The individual contributions, based on '*feeling, sentiment and subjectivity*' (Dovey, 2000: 127), are personal testimonies and forms of self-expression (Dowmunt, 2001: 20) that are oriented towards the nation. They offer images that originate and are consumed in a cycle of domesticity: '*the camcorder records private life, which is brought into the public domain, for consumption in the private world of the living room.*' (Dinsmore, 1996: 54). In the Shorts the traditional narrative situation is replaced by a speaking towards the nation, as Dovey (2000: 129) remarks: '*Contributors are all too aware that they are being given a chance to "speak to the nation", that they have a platform from which to project.*'

The construction of national unity through respectful communication of the internal cultural diversity is closely related to the work of the documentary school, and more specifically with the thought of one of the key persons of this movement, namely John Grierson. In this movement the labour of ordinary people – for instance in the herring fisheries in Grierson's documentary Drifters (1929) - is represented as authentic (and heroic (Thompson en Bordwell, 1994: 353)) as deemed possible with explicit educational objectives. The (educational) mission of this movement is oriented towards the representation of (the lived experience of) a societal segment in order to achieve a social-democratic consensus. A similar argument can be found in the still influential thought of the first BBC-director, John Reith, who emphasises the informational and educational function of the public service in order to strengthen societal cohesion. Humm (1998: 229) considers the connection between these objectives and the work of the CPU strong enough to call the CPU a '*Reithian outpost*'. As there are also important differences – located in the focus on the working class[34] and on factuality (to the detriment of meaning and emotion) – Dovey (2000: 131) prefers to call Video Nation a '*Neo-griersonian*' project.

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[34] Among others Rose (quoted by Morrison (2000: 37)) and Long (Interview 22/08/2002) criticise Grierson's emphasis on the working class. Rose describes Grierson's approach as: '*The middle class looking at the working class.*' In relation to the emphasis on factuality Morrison (2000: 25) refers to both her interview with co-producer Rose as to Jennings's work (one of the Mass-Obs' founders): '*Both reject the Griersonian emphasis on "facts" in favour of an exploration of subjective meaning.*'

At the same time the question arises which (national) community is represented. Morrison's (2000: 50) critique was already mentioned above: racism, xenophobia, misogyny and snobbery are not present in the Video Nation Shorts, which results in a very positive and uncritical portrayal of the British society. In her conclusion Morrison (2000: 60) writes: '*Life is not cruel, degrading, divisive or meaningless the films say; this is a positive reality, this day-to-day of the life world. […] I find the ethos of VNS beautiful and moving – being no stranger to 'romantic faith' myself – but I think it is important to recognise the argument that it risks ignoring the power dynamics that exist in British society and their impact upon all of our everyday lives.*' A nuance is that many of these problems that Morrison enumerates are dealt with in the Shorts, but from the position of the person that is confronted with these problems. In the Crime-section[35] of the web archive three Shorts on burglary (Break-in van Jean Lee, Crime van Colin O'Dell-Athill by Burgled van Nicola Fyfe) and one Short on vandalism (Damage by Danusia Malina) are included. In the Fears-section[36] Imtiaz Viad reports (in the Short Why) on a racist inspired attack: '*It's just so scary […] And it's not fair. […] That's not how society is supposed to progress. We're supposed to be called a civilised society, and then you go up to people of a different colour, and then you hit them for being of a different colour. Why?*'

A second critique oriented towards the representation of the national community is oriented at the focus on the filming individual, which results in the exclusion of a number of elements of the social structure. One (important) exception is the frequent visual and auditive presence of the family (as in for example the Webshort Mouse, where a father, accompanied by his family and some of his children's friends walks through a field looking for a location to set free a captured mouse).

Figure 16: Representing the family: Mouse by M. McClean

Other social systems – as the work place and civil society organisations – are absent, which is partially explained by the lack of enthusiasm of the participants (and their colleagues) to film in the work place (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002). Below a number of screen shots from one of the rare exceptions are included. In the Short Steel Joe Pumford takes the viewer on a tour through the steel factory where he is employed.

Figure 17: Images of work: Steel by J. Pumford

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[35] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/subjects/anger.shtml
[36] http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/subjects/fears.shtml

Another explanation can be found in the focus of the project: '*People did record going on demonstrations and doing political stuff, and that was more than fine. That was important, but I think it was that willingness to be individual about it [which was important], and I think that was certainly incredibly important on things like ethnicity, that people didn't feel: "I've got to represent the Chinese people", that they could be themselves and not feel that they had to speak for … [...] They signed up to Video Nation as individuals, individuals who we wanted to have as diverse views as the views out there, which would mean that some of them were members of organisations. Although not the majority, because I think it is certainly not the majority of people who are activists in that kind of formal way. But we didn't want them to come on board as a group member, and as a kind of representative of the group.*' (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002)

Next to the reduced representation of social systems, and the resulting risk of the confinement of daily life to the private sphere (Morrison, 2000: 49), Video Nation also offers a reduced representation of community. The different participants address the viewer and the nation, but in these Shorts a dialogue or debate between the participants remains absent. The communication between members of a family is shown quite often, but this type of communication rarely exceeds the frame of the Short. From this perspective the claim of Video Nation to be an '*on-line video community*' can only be partially substantiated. The participants consider themselves to be part of the Video Nation project - there is in other words a sense of belonging – and they speak to the nation from this perspective, but at the same time communication, interaction and dialogue between the participants remains absent. References to other Shorts are not included (for reasons of production (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002)). Although the concept of community is (again) complex and saturated with meaning, even the more traditional approaches – that limit community to its geographical and ethnic articulation – attribute some importance to (potential) interaction. In Van Dijk's (1998: 45) list of four criteria the presence of a shared language and patterns of interaction features as the fourth criterion[37] of community. Although the participants are (seen to be) part of the national community, it remains problematic to consider the group of participants (within the current web-structure) a community in itself. The production team has planned to remedy this weakness in the project: '*The idea being that people would communicate with one another and respond to one another's videos through their own and through the message board (to-be). Also, that the filming tips would broaden out into a much bigger peer-to-peer exchange of advice and information, with, possibly, some professional input as well.*' (Feedback Chris Mohr – 6/11/2002)

The third basic principle of Video Nation is the decentralised power structure. Dovey (2000: 126) calls this '*the most devolved power structure that TV institutions can offer.*' One of the co-producers formulates this as follows: '*I think, what they had was some really good concrete power, they had concrete power that we underlined and made very clear they got.*' (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002)

The Video Nation project builds on the participatory perspective that was developed by Video Diaries, as sharing the (editorial) control with the participants was an important characteristic of the production process of these documentaries. In the Video Nation case three different domains can be distinguished, where the participants are attributed a higher degree of power than is common within the media system. All three domains build on the participatory attitude of the involved media professionals. They accept the participants as equal partners in the production process and the resulting programmes. This attitude is closely related to the Freirian approach of the egalitarian student-teacher relation, to Curran's (1997: 30) view of the media professional as facilitator of participation in the public domain and to Manca's (1989) plea for a media professional as gate-opener (and not as the traditional gate-keeper).

The first domain in which the participants are attributed more control is the use of technology. A camcorder is placed at their disposal and the decision what to film is theirs. One of the co-producer describes this as follows: '*In the training, I think, [there was] just that underlining that it was them – it's them - that turn the camera on, nothing gets reordered that they don't chose to record, so that in terms of the raw material, they create that raw material.*' (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002) The

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[37] The other three are: 1/to have members, 2/to have a social structure and 3/to have a culture and shared identity.

only obligation they are subjected to is that they are required to send in a 90 minutes tape every fortnight[38]. The contract they conclude does not contain an obligation at the level of content: '*The contracts they signed gave them a token sum of money for shooting paid out gradually during the year. The contract was deliberately open, stating that they would shoot material "in accordance with discussion with the BBC representative". There was no contractual obligation to shoot anything at all.*' (Rose, 1995: 10) The co-producers moreover clearly state that at all times they refrained from exercising pressure. One important addition is that not all videos are shot independently by the participants without the assistance of the production team. In some cases – when confronted with for instance time constraints - a procedure of '*assisted filming*' is applied, and participants are counselled during the filming of the raw material.

The second domain where the position of the participants is strengthened is situated at the level of training and support. The participants receive a (brief) training, in order to familiarise them with the equipment, the filmic language and the (legal) consequences of working for a broadcasting company. Originally the production team opted for two day workshops, but later the duration of these training session was shortened; in the web-phase of the project the training has become more individualised (hence the existence of the training-Shorts on the Video Nation website – see above). The original workshops '*involved a brief technical training, a lot of talking about the project and exercises during which people became accustomed to shooting "subjectively" rather than as the silent observers of the "home movie".*' (Rose, 1995: 10)

The more general training is complemented by additional technical and content-related briefings, in combination with further telephonic support[39]. In the content-related briefings – inspired by one of Mass-Obs' methods – participants were invited to send in material on a specific (broad) issue, as for instance '*the least favourite thing*': '*this week we'd like you to shoot something you don't like. It could be the traffic on the high street, the weather or the socks which your son leaves on the bedroom floor. It would be nice if the subject was something in your life which you could show us like the above examples but if there's been something else on your mind that you'd like an opportunity to talk about then here's your chance.*' (Fragment of a content-related briefing, quoted by Rose (1995: 10))

Thirdly, also in the domain of editing the participants are enabled to exercise control. As it is logistically deemed impossible to grant the participants physical presence during the editing (as was done in the Video Diaries case) they are offered an 'editorial veto' that is entered into the contract. Rose (1995: 10) summarises this right as follows: '*to see any material we wanted to transmit in context and to say no if, for any reason they weren't happy with it.*' Moreover the production team prefers an 'open' attitude towards editing the material that was handed in, and they tend to exercise restraint towards their own interventions (which explains the absence of added music and '*fancy editing*' (Interview Chris Mohr – 12/08/2002)) One of the co-producers describes and summarises this attitude with one word: '*unobtrusive*' (Interview Chris Mohr – 12/08/2002)) The right of veto is only rarely invoked, but has been used in a (limited) number of cases. Below two quotes from the video log files[40], where two participants describe (when questioned by the production team) the situation where the decided to invoke the editorial veto:

> '*Taped a New Year's Eve Party. Keen in beginning. Took clothes off. And he watched it. Was gobsmacked! I know I said you could put it in the archives but didn't think you'd watch it. Never want to see it again. So, I have used my veto.*' (Log tape 1)

> '*Yes, again, it was on behalf of the children. Because this was a family thing with us … It was a programme called "Men" and Edward's piece was put between two "creepy blokes". She*

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[38]As mentioned above, the participants that collaborate with the local websites can only use the camcorders for a short period. The agreement with them is more oriented towards the production of enough material for one or more Webshorts.

[39] One member of the production team is responsible for the support of 8 to 12 participants.

[40]These video log files contain the summaries and partial transcriptions of (almost) all tapes that were handed in by the participants. They are made by the production team to facilitate the editing process (and in this regard relatively reliable sources) and are preserved by the BFI. The editorial right of veto was also valid in relation to the inclusion of the material in the BFI-archive.

explains why she used the veto. A second occasion, Edward didn't want that people saw what Nicola was saying to him.' (Log tape 2)

This method is still used after the transfer of Video Nation to the web-environment, as is illustrated by the following quote from the 'faq'-file of the national website (BBC Video Nation, 2002):

'***Who edits the tapes?***
We do, but Video Nation hands over control to you. If you are unhappy about a finished video, then it just doesn't get shown. That way you are free to shoot first, decide later.'

These more egalitarian power relations do not imply that the production team abandons their professional management. The production team retains control on the production process and the output in a number of cases. As one co-producer remarks: '*It would be naïve to underestimate how – even in that context – we were the BBC people and they were the public.*' (Interview Mandy Rose – 13/08/2002) The production team remains responsible for the selection of the participants and for the concept development and its protection. During the training the participants are familiarised with the style and concept the production team has developed. The participants are in other words familiarised with the constraints with regard to form and content that are deemed proper to the media system, and that are normalised during the training sessions. Above has already been referred to the 'subjective' filming style that is preferred to the observational style that is common in home movies (Rose, 1995: 10). This preference also impedes the use of other documentary filming styles. Another example of the limitation brought on by the requirements of 'good television', is mentioned by Morrison (2000: 30): '*It appears that although "ordinary people" where allowed to be provocative, or even irritating, what they were not allowed to be was boring.*' Also other constraints have an effect: when confronted with the effect of the professional '*stop-watch culture*' (Schlesinger, 1987, 83), the production team tends to cut back on their basic principles and increase their impact on the filming process (and its outcome).

The conceptual and stylistic preferences are consolidated by the contacts between the participants and the production team and can also be found in the output (which is edited by the production team). While providing support the production team maintains a central position in the communicative network. Direct communication between the participants is not stimulated, '*[in order not] to blur the differences*'. (Interview Chris Mohr, 12/08/2002) In contrast to the participants the private lives of the members of the production team remain out of sight, an unbalance that has provoked the following reaction – preserved in a log file - from one of the participants: '*It's quite a funny feeling in the beginning. [...] It's funny because, in a way it's like being in a fish bowl. They see more of your private life, of us than we have seen of them.*' (Log tape 3) Finally, the members of the production team take on a stimulating role. As the executive producers puts it: '*We were never shy of asking people to film things.*' (Interview Bob Long – 22/08/2002) These initiatives are partially structured by the content-related briefings (see above) and by so-called envelope-questions. This last stimulatory technique consists of giving the participants a closed envelope and requesting them to open it in front of the camera. In one of the Webshorts (Video Nation by Jean Lee – see below) this technique can still be seen in operation.

Figure 18: An envelope-question: Video Nation by J. Lee
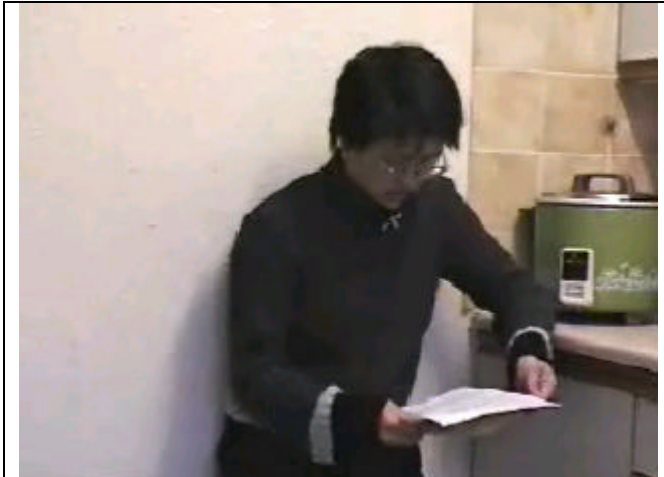
Next to these more structured techniques, some of the more content-related requests are embedded in the 'ordinary' communication between participants and production team: '*Sometimes they might have filmed something on a tape that was almost there but not quite so we might commission additional material or suggest that they might try again at a later date. There was this kind of in between stuff that went on all the time.*' (Interview Chris Mohr – 12/08/2002)

Finally, the editing process is in a high degree controlled by the production team. The editorial veto is mainly a negative right, which empowers the participants to prevent material from being broadcast, but at the same time stimulates the participants to film without any restraint, and is again part of the arsenal of managerial techniques. The actual selection of the material on the master tapes remains firmly in the hands of the production team, whose functioning is driven by professional criteria, although some (informal) negotiation with the participants is still a possibility. Also the decision to broadcast or webcast (approved of) Shorts remains exclusively in the hands of the production team. A summery of these power relations is given by the executive producer: '*It had to have a certain quality. We never guaranteed that anything they did would ever be on. That was kind of naïve, to do that ... So at the edit we did what we did. So I'm not suggesting, we never did suggest that we'd give unadulterated people power. They had more control than people ever had in television ... they had more control and support than everybody ever had, but we still retained the control of whether we put it out on tv or not. And also we trained and we invited people into the editing room, but we did the editing ourselves.*' (Interview Bob Long – 22/08/2002)

3.3. Evaluating Video Nation on the basis of the AIP-model

The evaluation of the Video Nation project is structured and summarised on the basis of the AIP-model that was developed in the first part of this paper. The evaluation of the participatory nature of the Video Nation project will first focus on the production-side, and then on the reception-side.

At the level of access to the content producing organisation a selected group of participants is granted effectively access to this BBC project. By placing cameras at the disposal of the participants they are enabled to produce video-material and have it broadcast (or webcast). Initially this access is organised through a centralised BBC production team, later the local websites become points of access. The evolution has a series of consequences, as now only the target groups of the four local websites are granted access, although there are plans to increase the number of local websites that are involved in the Video Nation project. At the same time the access within these four regions has increased, as the selection of participants is no longer centrally organised and less limited by the initial constraints in relation to the available broadcast time and the controllability of the participant group. While these four local websites offer increased access, they are still in a starting phase, which explains the relative low amount of Shorts on three of the four websites (with the exception of the 160 Shorts in Humber, where the production process deviated from the basic Video Nation principles) and the limited amount

of participants (31) in comparison with the national archive (91). Moreover the access in both cases (the television and the web project) is limited in time, as the cameras are on loan[41], and little arrangements have been made to broaden the project beyond the scope of its frame.

At the level of interaction the production team of Video Nation contributes significantly to the training of the participants, guaranteeing the transfer of basic skills to facilitate the use of the cameras. The training and support (through workshops, briefings and informal communication) is aimed at creating both technical and stylistic capabilities in other to satisfy the needs of the media system. Although these trainings are at the same time managerial instruments for the production team and although the acquired filmic language does not only function in a generative way, but also in a restrictive way, the educational support is nevertheless rare in the professional media system and from this regard extremely valuable.

In this discussion the training-Shorts deserve specific attention, as these Shorts do not only simplify the training, and render the training public. They also incorporate (in embryonic form) the opportunities for broadening the project. These Shorts are the only point where participants directly address other participants, and take the responsibility for a component of the project that is considered the production team's prerogative. An increased involvement of the more experienced participants would enable some of the constraints (related to the availability of staff) to be reduced and would enable a more vivid virtual Video Nation community. One of the main weaknesses of this project (in its actual form, with disregard of future developments) is exactly located at the level of the user-to-user interaction. When narrowly defined (as participant-to-participant interaction) the possibilities for interaction are limited, as debate and dialogue between the participants are not (structurally) encouraged. The participants address the (video)nation, and not each other. From a more broad perspective, the interaction of the participants with other social systems is again limited, with the exception of the presence of the family. When finally the scope is broadened even more, the possibilities for interaction increase, witness the many calls to visitors of the website to participate in the project and become a producer of Shorts. Nevertheless, the possibility of participant-user interaction (or debate) forms another area of improvement.
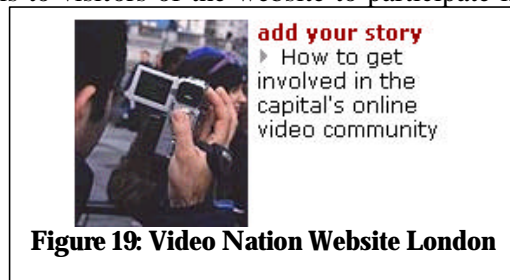

Figure 19: Video Nation Website London

At the level op participation this project (again) proves its value when it concerns the participation to the produced content. In contrast, the participation to the content and technology producing organisations remains minimal. At the project level participants are granted far more control than is customary in the media system. An important tool for control is the editorial veto which is anchored in the contract, and could be related to the plea for written participants' rights (see Hibberd et al., 2000). Possibly even more important is the participatory attitude of the media professionals, whose identity is no longer solely built on being a gate-keeper and producer of content, but also on gate-opening and facilitating the creation of content. The following quote from one of the co-producers shows that this change in position has not always been easy: '*Early on it felt like an abdication of my role as a producer to let views I disagreed with be transmitted without context or comment. I don't think so anymore (though that's not to say that particular pieces aren't troubling).*' (Rose, 1995: 10) This abdication is never complete (and is not expected to be complete), as the strategic management of the production team remains very much present during the production process. In most cases the participatory attitude of the media professionals prevents the power balance between participants and the production team from being disturbed. In some other cases, when for instance the production team cloaks their own interventions and active role, or when they weaken the concept by increasing the weight of their interventions (in the 'assisted filming'-scenario), some unnecessary power imbalances nevertheless arise.

At the reception-side of the AIP-model access to the content considered relevant is in the case of Video Nation increased by archiving the material on the website. The different categorisation systems further increase the opening up of the available material. It should be noted that – thinking along the

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[41]Some of the long-term participants were eventually told that they could keep the camera.

lines of the digital divide discourse – the access to this material is dependant upon the availability of on-line computers with enough resources to screen the Shorts. The plan to create a form of convergence between the different BBC platforms (where the Shorts can been seen or heard in the web-environment, on local radio and on regional television) would in this regard offer an important increase in access.

At the reception-side there is little information available regarding interaction, as no (reception) analysis of the used content and/or technologies has been implemented. It should nevertheless be noted that the Webshorts contain and offer a series of specific discourses that firstly validate the everyday culture of (among others) 'ordinary people'. These Shorts secondly visualise significations of cultural diversity, identity and unity within everyday culture, where these differences are effectively transcended and humanised. Finally the Shorts (and the accompanying texts on the website) also contain a discourse on participation, where it is shown and narrated how 'ordinary people' (non-professionals originating from a diversity of social classes) are granted access to the media system and can exercise a certain degree of power and control in relation to their activities in that system. The interaction (and participation – see above) with the content producing organisation remains at the same time restricted to the use of the general feedback webpages[42] and the calls for participating in the project.

4.   Conclusion

The main objective of this article is to develop an analytical model to evaluate cultural (media) products in relation to their participatory nature. The different theoretical frameworks, situated in both traditional and new media theories, have to a large extent contributed in the development of this model, but appear at the same time (for many different reasons) too weak to independently capture the complex social and cultural reality that lies hidden in these products. One of the most important reasons for the difficulties in the (isolated) application of these theoretical frameworks is that these frameworks are saturated with a multitude of (sometimes even contradictory) meanings. From a discourse theoretical position the floating and sliding of signifiers is explained by their articulation within strongly ideologically charged discourses and the political role they can (and have to) play. This semantic ambivalence complicates at the same time their use as an evaluation instrument. For this reason this article contains an integrated analytical model that has the ambition to attribute each basic concept (access, interaction and participation) a more or less fixed position within the model, thus delineating these concepts and increasing their applicability.

This analytical model is then put to work to evaluate one concrete cultural practice. The participatory claim that is formulated by the BBC has shown to be tenable. Video Nation is a project that - despite its 'banishment' to the web – shows to be able to stimulate on- and off-screen access, interaction and participation. Despite a number of limitations, this project offers 'ordinary people' the opportunity to address the nation, to show to the national community the differences and similarities, the repetitive and sublime that characterise everyday culture, to illustrate the interconnectedness of cultural, social, artistic and political dimensions, to engage in identity politics and the construction of (cultural) citizenship, and to prove that power and control in the media system do not have to remain in the hands of professionals, but can be shared with (empowered) non-professionals.

The Video Nation project can prove to be inspirational for both other broadcasters and policy-makers. At the level of the individual media professional and the production team Video Nation shows the feasibility of this type of trendsetting concept, without it ending in uncontrollable chaos or in what is considered 'bad television'. Especially the basic principles of this project, with a certain number of adaptations and additions, can serve as a source of inspiration. From this point of view Video Nation shows that media professionals who operate within the realm of soft news and/or human-interest news can live up to their societal responsibilities, which includes the acceptance of the inevitability of an ideological embeddedness. Building upon the three basic principles of Video Nation, the following elements can be highlighted:

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[42] http://www.bbc.co.uk/feedback/

? Focussing on the daily life of ordinary people, without reducing the everyday to the private and at the same time respecting the multilayeredness of these concepts, including the political, social, artistic and cultural domains that are interwoven with the everyday.

? Focussing on cultural diversity, whilst avoiding stereotyping and a too strong emphasis on the isolated individual, allowing (media) space for the audience-as-community and the organised audience.

? Focusing on the equal distribution of power between the participants and the members of the production team in the different phases of the production process, preferably supported by (written) participants' rights, embedded in their contracts.

These three basic principles build upon the overarching participatory attitude which characterises the media professionals that are involved in Video Nation. At the level of policy the introduction and further strengthening of this participatory attitude is to be deemed of primary importance, although existing projects as for instance initiated by the Belgian King Baudoin Foundation already offer significant contributions. Within the different broadcasting organisations (especially within the public broadcasters) more emphasis can be placed on familiarising media professionals with this audience- and community centred participatory attitude. The actual production of programmes based on the Video Nation concept is of course another step in the good direction, although the importance of the project-oriented approach (which is often omitted) needs to be stressed, not in the least as it allows for optimising the advantages of converging the web, radio and television-versions of Video Nation.

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