
The Tactical Tube: Resituating Participatory Video

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I conceived this brief video essay from my research on Gilles Deleuze's theory of cinematics and the moving image. I sought to use Deleuze's work to leverage an encounter with Alexander Galloway's research into networks in *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization*, and in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, a book he co-authored with Eugene Thacker. For me, Deleuze's discussion of cinema seemed a way to confront Galloway's apprehension over the universalizing tendencies of various protocols in online networks. For Galloway and Thacker, the Internet sacrifices diversity for what they term *UNIversity* when all communications happen at the same level. We must account for such concepts when attempting to formulate theories of the participatory nature of YouTube. Certainly, on one level YouTube appears to provide a space for its endless variation. At the same time, however, if we are to look at YouTube through the lens that Galloway and Thacker provide, it is both rigidly regulated and highly participatory. Deleuze's ruminations on cinema, especially his discussions of filmmaker Jean Rouch, can help us free up possibilities for conceiving of networks that are more participatory.

Protocols are, in simplest terms, conventions that manage the connection and transfer of information. While protocols provide the rules of syntax for the raw data that make up the Internet, Galloway expands this definition significantly beyond the context of the Web. "Protocol is," according to Galloway, "a language that regulates flow, directs net-space, codes relationships, and connects life-forms" (*Protocol* 74). Through protocols, networks create voluntary regulation. Protocol does not coerce in any traditional sense, but it does attempt to regulate with a light touch. Specifically, protocols achieve such regulation through compatibility, and the cost of such compatibility is diversity. In order to communicate, a protocol must be followed. If the protocol is not followed, *there is no participation*. A user can do nothing for which the protocol does not allow.

In terms of regulation, we can regard protocols as a kind of bureaucracy. With that in mind, I use Deleuze's analysis of Rouch to attempt a different kind of participation. Rouch's filmmaking was a source of great inspiration for Deleuze's film-philosophy. A "participatory ethnographer," Rouch "invites the people he lives with to join him in his fieldwork, *not as students*, but as teachers initiating the ignorant anthropologist into the wisdom of their ways" (Bogue 151, emphasis mine). The people with whom Rouch lives are invited to create fictions and to reinvent themselves in new and unanticipated ways. Rouch and Deleuze provide us with an interesting insight into the ways that videography might be deployed in classroom practice. Protocols mark a bureaucratic structure that attempts to dictate the manner in which participation takes place. However, through Rouch and Deleuze, we might be able to work through the bureaucracy of protocol to find alternate arrangements of participation. We must think of what the bureaucracy might provide. Craig Saper's arguments in *Networked Art* encourages just such thinking, wherein artists make use of a pre-existent bureaucracy in an effort to create something for which that bureaucracy cannot account. The means of applying such a theory in a composition classroom using videography comprise the core of my video essay.

The means by which networked art must be applied are, of course, tactical. They must not be strategic, but rather pliable, fluid, changeable. In *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*, Thomas Rickert best corroborates my conceptions of thinking tactically in a bureaucracy. Rickert seeks a pedagogy that “shift[s] control of the dominant loci of contention from the teacher to the student” (163). This pedagogy involves placing students in situations where they must take risks and even possibly surprise themselves. In these situations, the teacher acknowledges acts of writing (broadly speaking) that have “unacknowledged value, whether transgressive, inventive, or otherwise productive” (164). Such a pedagogy means thinking and *teaching* tactically: allowing for the possibilities that the students, the course, and the processes and products will surprise us. The indicator of Rickert’s postpedagogy is surprise (172), which Rickert evokes precisely because of its indeterminacy. Here I hope to create a line of flight out of Rickert’s pedagogy by placing this video in the context he articulates, allowing for students to forge different connections, different networks, and different communities by the ways in which their videos might interact with one another.

My original draft of this paper was presented at the 2010 Computers & Writing Conference at Purdue University. I used much of the imagery that you will see in the video as background footage over my reading of the paper. This footage, along with new images, formed the basis by which I began to construct the video. I’m not necessarily using this imagery to “explain” the reading, but instead I hope that my words and these images find interesting and unusual connections. My hope is that this video, and especially the work of Craig Saper and media artist Christopher Baker, can help stir possible thinking in those who are using videography, visuals, new media, and even the work of Greg Ulmer in their classrooms. I do not, by any means, think that such an exercise “solves” the problems of protocol that Galloway and Thacker raise, but I hope that this project represents an attempt to *think with them*, and to see what they offer us in composition. Lastly, I wish to express my fond gratitude toward Geoffrey Carter and Sarah Arroyo for their patience and assistance with this project.

Works Cited

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