The great jump cut (r)evolution: A case for studying the evolution of vlogging production techniques
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Abstract
Traditionally, the term ‘jump cut’ has described film or video edits that jump forward in time and detract from a sense of continuity. In the early days of online video platforms, such as YouTube, video bloggers employed jump cuts while editing their direct-address monologues to allow them to string together the best parts of the performance. It could even be said now that jump cutting a monologue is one of the inherent conventions of vlogging. This paper argues that vlogging culture has not only adopted the jump cut as core to its productions, but also adapted and evolved it for specific vlog use. The vlogging space is rich in moving image innovation and instances of this, such as the vlogging jump cut, need to be identified, analysed, and discussed — just as occurred for cinema and television during their past periods of emergence.

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Introduction
I’m watching one of Casey Neistat’s video blog, or ‘vlog’, episodes, Movie stars prank the press (2016). Neistat is perhaps one of the world’s most famous vloggers — having currently over 11 million YouTube
channel subscribers and over two and a half billion total views across his 1,000+ videos (Social Blade, 2020). He’s addressing the camera directly, as is customary to the aesthetic of most vlogs (Tolson, 2010), and is explaining what’s going to happen in the next scene. As Neistat begins introducing the two famous actors, however, he seems to momentarily forget the first actor’s name. Stuttering, he completes it, but then continues to stumble towards the second actor’s name. Instead of allowing his own sentence to continue in this disaster of a shot, Neistat abruptly cuts to a short stylised slow-motion insert shot featuring the two actors in question — complete with their names assigned in text on the screen. This insert ends in silence over their frozen image. The next shot, a continuation of the first shot of Neistat, cuts in abruptly with him in mid-sentence as he continues his previously interrupted monologue.

As a viewer who is cognitively involved in making sense of the text, I’m not confused by what happens on screen, and I’m not disturbed by the obviousness of Neistat’s on-screen fumble. If anything, my engagement is heightened by the creativity Neistat employed in recovering from his minor blunder, and I am reminded of his tendency to approach his filmmaking in a ‘show — don’t tell’ way. Neistat could have either reshoot himself introducing the actors at the time or found a way in the edit to identify the two actors without using the bungled take. Indeed, one of these two approaches would likely have been undertaken if the video was being made for a more formal media outlet, such as free-to-air or cable television. There is an authenticity in a famed creator presenting themselves as fallible, though, and authenticity is a convention of video blogs that stems back to their emergence as a new moving image genre (Tufnell, 2013).

Neistat, who almost always shoots and edits his own work, has employed the ‘jump cut’ (Trustees of Columbia University, 2015) video editing tool for various uses over the years — to the point where it is very much a part his personal vlogging style. Some of these uses of the jump cut reflect the more traditional forms that you might commonly see in mainstream media such as television programs, feature films, or advertisements. Others, though, such as the one described above, are more ‘vlogging-specific’, and seem to have emerged from the very affordances and social environments of the Internet and online video platforms such as YouTube.

Indeed, as Michael Z. Newman (2008) suggests, early video bloggers were “making it up as they [went] along, discovering common solutions to shared problems” in what Maximiliane Frobenius notes was, at that time, “a genre so young that the conventions [were] still in a process of negotiation” [1]. These creatives were exploring the affordances of a new media form by negotiating and developing conventions that suited their technical knowledge, practical capabilities, and desire to invent their own personal style [2].

As an example of this, Hosea Frank, of The Show with Ze Frank (2006), has explained that he performed his early videos to camera live without a script — “inventing his act with the camera running” [3]. His show was then created by identifying the most appropriate parts of his performance — usually being one shot to a single thought — and cutting these shots sequentially. This ‘jump cut monologue’ approach to editing resulted in Frank’s signature frenzied and erratic tone, which worked towards increasing audience engagement but also in setting his work apart from the more professional broadcast television news productions that he was remediating [4]. Though Frank’s early videos were published on his own Web site and not uploaded to YouTube until much later, they were influential in publicly defining the video blog genre and establishing some of its formal characteristics as taken up by later vloggers on YouTube [5]. One of these formal characteristics is the jump cut monologue.

As an extension of vlogging’s experimental beginnings, in this article I will focus on the unique way in which jump cuts are currently used by many vloggers. In doing such I suggest that vlogging is a technological and social environment that supports the creation of novel features of moving image grammar. Further, I suggest that more research into the specific production techniques and practices of the vlogging genre is required, as it is currently an area of moving image innovation.
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Moving image grammar

I will use the phrase ‘moving image’ to identify the collection of media, genres, and modes of screen production that includes cinema, television, film, video, YouTube, and more. Though some theorists speak of ‘cinematic techniques’ and ‘film language’ to describe the many enduring codes and conventions of moving image production and distribution in general [6], I suggest that although cinema and film were perhaps primary vehicles for establishing these there has been an immense amount of progress and evolution in the moving image field over the last 70 years or so. The introduction of analogue video and television are of particular note, as is that of digital video and online platforms such as YouTube. Creative practice through each of these technological substrates has seen their own distinct genres, codes, and conventions develop. As such, some quotes in this article may reflect a ‘medium/genre-specific’ orientation as the root of an underlying theory. Where necessary, though, I will attempt to make it clear whether my use of terms is truly medium/genre specific or perhaps applies more generally to the category of moving images.

As Daniela Tecucianu indicates, the concept of ‘grammar’ can be employed to describe “certain conventions of shooting and editing that are often followed to determine particular emotional responses or to create the illusion of continuous action in time and space” [7]. These are usually sight- and/or sound-based, and include shooting a closeup to encourage the audience to feel more intimate with a character, employing a non-diegetic soundtrack to guide and support the audience’s emotions, or cutting during the action within a shot to disguise the sharp transition from one shot of a continuous event to another shot from a different angle and with a dissimilar framing. The latter technique, taught to virtually all formally trained film and video editors as the foundation of continuity editing, is called ‘cutting on action’ or ‘match action’ [8]. Editing for continuity, or ‘flow’ between shots is a mainstay of what is called the ‘Classical Hollywood Style’ [9].

Though in the quote above Tecucianu is referring explicitly to cinema, many of the grammatical elements she discusses in her article (such as framing, camera movement, lighting, shot transitions, etc.) are not cinema specific. However, some grammatical aspects of the moving image are indeed specific to mediums or genres of moving image production. For example, the genre of the television talk show presents codes and conventions particular to being shot by multiple video cameras that are simultaneously trained on a live discussion that is regulated and moderated by a host. These include that the audience does not find it disturbing if the shot from one television camera captures the existence of other cameras. Nor is it altogether undesirable from a creator’s perspective for the odd microphone to enter the frame. Conversely, these incidents would clash with the traditional codes and conventions of the television soap opera — which often seek to erase signs of the screen production process. In turn, I suggest that video blogging also embraces codes and conventions that are specific to this moving image genre — and that the way jump cuts are used is among these.

In describing an agreed set of rules in relation to the language of moving images, of course, I do not use the term ‘grammar’ literally. Though many attempts have been made by film critics to demonstrate otherwise, as Weise notes, “filmic [or moving image] discourse is not an exact match to verbal discourse” [10]. Hence, in this case, the term ‘grammar’ is used purely as a creative metaphor. Further, it should be acknowledged that the ‘rules’ of moving image language are not rules, so much, as guidelines to use as a starting point in creating a cohesive and comprehensible moving image artefact. These guidelines are not finite in number, and those that exist also often evolve over time.

The jump cut

If cutting on action can be seen as a prescription for continuity, then an editor’s deliberate use of the ‘jump cut’ is decidedly discontinuous. A jump cut is often defined as a challenge to good moving image grammar
The great jump cut (r)evolution: A case for studying the evolution of vlogging production techniques in its breaking of what is called ‘the 30° rule’. This directive for creating a sense of moving image continuity suggests that two consecutive shots of the same object, subject, or event should exhibit a minimum of 30° difference in camera angle [11]. To not do so will cause a jarring or jolting of the audience’s viewing experience, or a ‘jump’.

Roger Crittenden’s understanding of the jump cut is similar, but slightly different:

Strictly speaking [a jump cut is] the effect obtained by removing a section from the middle of a shot and joining the remaining head and tail of the shot, thus provoking a jump in the action. [The term is also] Loosely applied to any such abrupt change that implies a missing part of the original visual continuity. [12]

The traditional example of Crittenden’s understanding of the jump cut is the driving scene from Jean-Luc Godard’s 1960 film, *Breathless*. Here, shots of the actress in a convertible repeatedly cut to nearly identical shots of the very same, but at a later point in time so that the light, background, and her position change slightly. The consistency across both Morante’s and Crittenden’s understandings, though, is that the two shots cut sequentially are of the same object, subject, or event, and that that object, subject, or event has suddenly and unexpectedly shifted slightly in its perspective or position on screen.

Other researchers identify the jump cut more broadly as “nothing more than the joining of two non-contiguous shots. Whether the two shots recognize a change in direction, focus on an unexpected action, or simply don’t show the action in one shot that prepares the viewer for the content of the next shot” [13]. This understanding of a jump cut, however, could possibly include cuts that are otherwise often deemed a ‘smash cut’. This latter technique has “one scene abruptly cutting to another for aesthetic, narrative, or emotional purpose”, and is usually unexpected for dramatic effect (Miyamoto, 2018). Under this definition of a jump cut, the famous ‘match cut’ (Baker, 2016) in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A space odyssey* (1968), where the shot of a thigh bone spinning through the air cuts to the similar shape of a satellite hurtling through space, also qualifies. Notable here is that Kubrick’s ‘match cut’ is further eligible to be called a ‘smash cut’.

You may argue that the jump cut is ‘anti-grammatical’ — but remember that even a convention that causes the audience to be less complacent about the coherence of time and/or space is still an element of moving image language. That is, as a production tool the jump cut can be utilised to induce a pre-determined emotional, cognitive, or physiological response in a viewer. As Ken Dancyger outlines,

the jump cut has simply become another editing device accepted by the viewing audience. They have accepted the notion that discontinuity can be used to portray a less stable view of society or personality or that it can be accepted as a warning. It warns viewers that they are watching a film and to beware of being manipulated. [14]

These days jump cuts can readily be found in even the most mainstream of films and TV series. As Karen Pearlman notes, the jump cut has been assimilated into the rules of continuity cutting — as an element of style [15].

As seen above, there is some divergence amongst scholars as to what exactly constitutes a jump cut. I would suggest that none of the varying descriptions and understandings of a jump cut are incorrect. In the end, the jump cut editing technique is jarring and a challenge to continuity — be it deliberate, or not. The fact that a smash cut, which does indeed cause the audience to experience a jolt, could be but a particular way of enacting this indicates that perhaps we need to start defining different forms or modes of jump cut. In its somewhat forensic discussion regarding the specificities of the jump cut as used in video blogs, this
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The paper contributes to this aim.

Seeking to expand our screen vocabulary to more accurately classify various types of jump cuts reflects the roots of montage theory, where Sergei Eisenstein identified five types of montage that differed in their underlying concept and effect on the viewer (Hess, 2017). Indeed, Eisenstein’s ‘intellectual montage’ could, itself, be seen as a form of jump cut: the collision of two differing depictive shots dialectically juxtapose to yield a higher ‘third meaning’ [16]. It speaks to the core of screen production scholarship to recognise where nuances in existing knowledge need teasing out and further defining for future interrogation and discussion. To assist in doing this with regard to how jump cuts are distinctively used in video blogging, it is useful to recount Joseph Anderson’s explanation of why a moving image jump cut causes viewers to experience a jolt.

Why jump cuts jump

Anderson is a proponent of cognitive film theory, which is a perspective for understanding “film form and spectator psychology based on the kinds of mental activities described by cognitive psychology” [17]. Essentially, this cognitivist research tradition works on the basis that the grammar of moving images developed the way it did because the human brain developed the way it did [18]. As such, Anderson explains that our experience of a jump cut is a challenge to the innate functioning of our perceptual processing system as developed in the course of our biological evolution [19].

This functioning holds that we evolved to visually perceive our world, that is continuous in both time and space, in a succession of partial views. With only two degrees of our visual field in full focus at any time, the eye must move constantly to take in particular aspects of the world in what is called ‘saccadic eye movement’ [20]. The resultant visual grabs of our environment are collated to form a model of our surroundings in our minds.

The above biological system is what allows us to understand a film when it cuts from a shot of one subject/object to a shot of a different subject/object [21]. The problem for our perceptual system arises when an editor cuts from a shot of one subject/object to a very similar shot of the same subject/object. This rapid repositioning of a subject/object is not something that we expect to see in the real world — and so our mind lets us know that something is not quite right via a cognitive jolt.

The ‘30° rule’ becomes relevant here, as respecting it allows moving image editors to cut two shots of the same subject/object together without causing the audience to experience a jump. This is because it gives instruction to ensure that the two shots are different enough from each other so as to offer our perceptual system information that we have physically changed position — rather than the subject/object having suddenly changed position [22]. The obvious critique here, though, is that vision isn’t the only sense that helps us determine whether we have changed our position in the real world.

Ordinarily, when we experience significant changes in what we see in each partial view, our sense of proprioception (i.e., the sense of self-movement and body position) will feed back that we have turned our heads or moved our bodies. When watching a movie on a two-dimensional screen, of course, this proprioceptive information is mostly lacking — but when the change between two shots satisfies the 30° rule our visual information overrides this lack for the pure sake of survival. That is, we simply cannot afford to doubt our visual system that we have indeed moved [23]. However, if our perceptual system does not offer significant indication that we, ourselves, have moved, we perceive the subject/object as having suddenly changed position. This is clearly a situation that, from an evolutionary perspective, we should find alarming, and as such we experience a cognitive ‘jolt’ at cuts where the two shots of the subject/object are different — but at the same time too similar. This applies to both the 30° rule as well as removing a section of time from a longer shot, as detailed above.
**Video blogs emerge**

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the way that the World Wide Web was viewed by most users underwent a conceptual shift from primarily a place for the retrieval of information to incorporating social platforms that encourage participation (O’Reilly, 2005). Of course, potential for the latter, which we now call ‘Web 2.0’, had existed via the two-way, synchronous or asynchronous, many-to-many affordances of the Internet since its inception. This had even manifested in wikis (e.g., WikiWikiWeb in 1994), social networking sites (e.g., Classmates.com in 1995), and Justin Hall’s 1994 weblog posts well before the heralding of Web 2.0 (Sholz, 2008). Even the e-mail program that supported online conversations between ARPANET users in 1973 was social. Somewhat prophetically in 1996, Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan (1996) signalled the potential for a significant cultural shift in Internet usage, suggesting that when communicating through it “the receivers, or audiences, of these messages can also number from one to potentially millions, and may or may not move fluidly from their role as audience members to producers of messages”. Axel Bruns (2006) would later name these consumers of content who could also choose to be content producers, ‘produsers’.

Given that the digital video production revolution had occurred in the mid-1990s, Henry Jenkins notes that “many groups were ready for something like YouTube; they already had communities of practice that supported the production of DIY media, already evolved video genres and built social networks through which such video could flow” [24]. The participatory media cultures had thus formed long before the digital video distribution revolution a decade later, and potential produsers were only waiting for the appropriate technological conditions to be met to begin sharing their video content. This came from the introduction of social media platforms, such as YouTube, which provided users with “unlimited space for storage, and plenty of tools to organise, promote, and broadcast their thoughts, opinion, behaviour, and media to others” [25]. Afforded by this potential to self-publish moving-image content on video hosting Web sites, “users started generating original content to make use of this medium created by technical progress” [26]. From these foundations the practice of video blogging emerged.

Video blogging is what Burgess calls ‘vernacular creativity’, or a creative practice that has “emerge[d] from highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions” [27]. Indeed, Frobenius notes that early vlogs were “significantly shaped by the social context: a vlogger [was] an independent (usually, but not necessarily), unpaid, private, and untrained individual”, which set them apart from the more formal and professional television news broadcasts [28]. This position gave vloggers the potential to engage in comedy, to present their personal opinion, and to experiment with production techniques and practices.

The jump cut monologue was adopted as a post-production technique over time by many early video bloggers as part of what was an ongoing collective negotiation of the new genre’s conventions [29]. It was only a few years after YouTube’s creation that Jean Burgess and Joshua Green recognised video blogging as a dominant form of user-created content on YouTube, and that addressing a webcam directly and cleverly editing the resulting monologue had become characteristic to this “emblematic form of YouTube participation” [30].

Phil Lester began his YouTube vlogging channel, AmazingPhil (2006), just one year after the platform commenced. His technique of jump cutting his recorded monologue is indicative of Frank’s practice, as previously described, in cutting together the best parts from a recorded monologue. Lester’s first video blog, published on 26 March 2006, consists of him talking to camera in one continuous take for just over two minutes. Over his next couple of years publishing on YouTube, Lester began to introduce edits into his vlogs. Sometimes these were used to create small film-like skits, but jump cuts were also clearly employed in an effort to keep any monologue flowing smoothly. The result is a jump cut sequence of coherent, if not
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visually interrupted, monologic performance.

Conversely, in a professional video production environment all jump cuts should be obscured (Sullivan and Fadde, 2010). The editing of continuous original interview footage — or the combining of separate takes or ‘grabs’ of a presenter — is often disguised with what are called ‘cutaways’, or ‘B-roll’ (MasterClass, 2019). These are shots that do not display the person talking, and yet are usually relevant to what this person is talking about. Cutaways are inserted over any vision edits in the monologue to help avoid jarring the viewer with jump cuts. To an audience, the finished result appears to be one well-presented continuous take interspersed with other footage and/or still images. Instead, if the interview footage consists of shots of both an interviewer and interviewee (i.e., a conversation between two people), then reaction shots of the interviewer, or shots of them asking the questions, can also be used as cutaways to negate any edits in the interviewee’s footage causing a viewer to experience a jarring at the resulting jump cut.

Early video bloggers, however, were not constrained to, what David Buckingham, Maria Pini, and Rebekah Willett call, the “formulaic approach of commercial cinema or television”, but instead existed within the less-prescriptive realm of the non-professional video maker [31]. This is one of the benefits of being, a ‘serious amateur’ who wishes to improve their video-making skills and techniques while also refining their understanding and usage of ‘film grammar’ (Buckingham, et al., 2009). That is, one is free to explore the grammar of the moving image — see what works, and what doesn’t, and expand the audio-visual vocabulary where required. This position gave early vlog creators more scope to develop a unique aesthetic style that emphasised authenticity through direct address and transparent amateurishness [32]. The vlogging jump cut is one result of their collective experimentation with the communicative affordances of this emerging genre.

The jump cut created by a vlogger cutting out a section of recorded monologue, and Crittenden’s understanding of a jump cut, as described above, may seem virtually the same. That is, “removing a section from the middle of a shot and joining the remaining head and tail of the shot” [33]. I suggest, though, that there is something about the creative use of the now-ubiquitous vlogging jump cut that makes it unique — that makes it ‘vlog specific’. This is that, traditionally, the jump cut as explained by many editing theorists is all about vision, yet the vlogging jump cut is very much related to sound. It’s also more about keeping the video flowing smoothly, instead of interrupting such.

Audio and jump cuts

Though our real-world visual existence is a succession of partial views, our aural experience is not segmented. As Anderson says, “our ears are always open and especially tuned to abrupt changes in the sonic flow” [34]. Abrupt changes in a moving image soundtrack, then, can be at least as disturbing as a visual jump cut — if not more so. Hearing the sound from subjects/objects suddenly appear or disappear are both causes for us to pay further attention. The audio editing of a vlogger, though, usually aims for a smooth delivery of their edited monologue. The effort here is primarily placed in creating a clear and logical flow of verbal language and, hence, meaning.

Note also that when editing the performance of a vlogging monologue it is done with the aim of keeping the sound in synchronisation with the vision. In fact, it is achieving this aim through splicing together specific snippets of the recorded monologue that necessitates a visual jump cut between shots. This ‘synchrony’ between hearing words and seeing the lips of the vlogger moving in a way you would expect is something that we seek as humans. Anderson suggests that when we find speech synchrony “we lock our eyes onto the lips of the speaker and our ears onto the stream of utterances, even if we are too young to have learned the particular language” [35]. In this case I argue that jump cutting the vision of a vlogger while maintaining continuity of monologue, as well as synchrony, evokes the concept of ‘edit blindness’.
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Edit blindness is where various shots are spliced together in a moving image production, but the audience does not notice the cuts. Tim Smith and John Henderson show that the likeliness of a viewer experiencing this blindness is increased if the rules of continuity editing are adhered to \[36\]. In the case of cutting on action, this can be explained by the audience’s attentional resources being limited at the time of the cut by the action itself. Smith and Henderson also indicate that following the narrative of a film, itself, can result in insufficient attention being available for a viewer to be aware of cuts in the vision \[37\]. Implicitly, this latter reason for edit blindness would also apply to the narrative element in any moving image production, including the monologue of a video blog.

It is the role of audio in edit blindness that is perhaps most interesting in relation to jump cutting video blog monologues, though. Tim Smith and Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues Santacreu suggest that the edit blindness effect of cutting on action is significantly reduced without the “continuous perceptual scaffold of a soundtrack” \[38\]. Though Smith and Santacreu used scenes from famous feature films in their study, such as Contact (Zemeckis, 1997) and Groundhog day (Ramis, 1993), it seems perfectly reasonable to transpose this idea to other moving image mediums and genres. That is, I suggest that a flow of audio across the jump cut in a video blog monologue increases the audience’s attention on the moving image content, itself, and less on its production processes.

Synchrony, no doubt, also plays a large part here, as the vlogger’s continuing lip sync creates a compelling instance of ‘cross-modal confirmation’ that Anderson suggests we cannot ignore \[39\]. That is, the two sensory modes of sight and sound are in simultaneous agreeance before and after the jump cut. As such, audience attention continues to be drawn towards the visual and aural content and away from the cut, itself. This ultimately smooths out any perception of jarring when watching vlogging jump cuts. As one YouTube viewer comments under a video that demonstrates how to edit the vlogging jump cut for the least amount of jarring, “I really dont mind a jump cut, sometimes I dont even realise [sic]” (Uys, 2018). This comment had 36 ‘likes’ at the time of this writing.

The vlogging jump cut

The result of the above examination is a practical description of the specific workings behind a mode of jump cut that emerged from within the video blogging environment that thrived primarily on YouTube. Jump cutting a monologue in this way has become such a common convention for creating a video blog that there are many resources on vlogging that will teach you how to successfully employ this style (Dryden, 2017). Further, this manifestation of the jump cut is an aspect of moving image grammar that has not been readily adopted by more traditional moving image genres that also consist of a presenter directly addressing the audience — such as television news or talk shows.

It may seem that recording a monologue and cutting away the unwanted parts is quite similar to Godard shooting one long continuous take of a passenger conversing in a convertible and jump cutting the resulting action. Even the aural continuity of the vlogging monologue can be seen as functioning in a similar way to how the music and dialogue in Breathless (Godard, 1960) convertible scene does. Breathless is not a video blog, however, as it does not feature an individual directly addressing the audience in cohesive monologue, for one. Nor do its jump cuts aim for smoothness and flow, but, instead, a deliberate jarring. Thus, the mechanics of Godard’s jump cut underlies what is a more specifically cinematic trope.

As Newman points out, though video bloggers do borrow from the productions of mainstream media, early vloggers invented their own production routines and conventions that were more artisanal than industrial, and are now specific to the video blog genre \[40\]. Burgess and Green identify this early experimentation with the video form as “an explicit foregrounding of the medium itself that has historically been associated with the emergence of new media technologies” \[41\]. In this, Martin Gibbs, James Meese, Michael Arnold, Bjorn Nansen, and Marcus Carter would nominate video blogging as a ‘platform vernacular’, in the sense
that this genre of communication emerged primarily from YouTube’s programmed affordances and “the ways that they were appropriated and performed in practice” [42] by existing participatory cultures.

Though it is true that direct audience address is not a new moving image technique, the video blogging practice is one where exhibiting authenticity is more crucial to audience engagement than high production values or sophisticated narratives [43]. What Dovey calls ‘first person media’, or “subjective, autobiographical, and confessional modes of expression” [44], are also not new. However, YouTube’s potential for global distribution, and the degree of malleability and audience interaction, are, as Michael Strangelove notes, unprecedented [45]. Unlike traditional media content, video bloggers are often merely part of what Lev Manovich calls a “media conversation” [46]. On platforms such as YouTube, for example, it is hard to know where the ‘content’ ends — as through each video’s comments section other users continue to contribute to the vlog content as co-producers.

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**The vlogging jump cut evolves**

If it is not yet clear that, what I call, the ‘vlogging jump cut’ is specific to the video blogging genre, note that this technique has evolved over the years to incorporate further nuances that emphasise such. Early vloggers, including Hosea Frank of *The Show with Ze Frank* (2006) and Kent Nichols and Douglas Sarine of the YouTube channel, *Ask a Ninja* (2005), progressed jump cutting within a vlogging monologue to incorporate intentional shifts in composition and framing of the presenter between cuts. That is, when a new shot of the vlogger is cut to, the background remains consistent, but the vlogger is often either posed differently; positioned differently in the shot; or scaled up or down in size relative to the frame.

As indicated earlier, Frank states that this occurred within his productions because he often performed without a script and created his show with the camera running and little care for consistent positioning of himself within frame [47]. In post-production he then assembled the relevant fragments of main commentary, spontaneous interactions to his own monologue, conversations between himself, and frequent interjections with short lines to increase dramatic effect, and any other relevant images or footage, to create his show. The result is what Newman calls a “jittery cutting style” [48].

Though the above is unarguably how Frank started his vlogging career, it is clear from watching Frank’s later vlogs that he quickly refined his early practice of accidental reframing while jump cutting and adopted it as a style. That is, over the remainder of 2006 the reframing of Frank’s face during his interjections clearly became deliberate and consistent — cutting between various degrees of closeup and extreme closeup for comic accentuation of specific spoken lines. It is the standard vlogging jump cut as detailed above, but with a twist: intentional reframing for specific effect.

The vlog work of Nichols and Sarine (2005) is even more calculated in its adoption and adaption of jump cuts as an editing style. The videos display a man dressed as a ninja explaining to camera, in parody, the intricacies of a ninja’s life. The monologue is separated into sound bites, with each being a different delivered line or phrase. Further, each time the video cuts we see the masked ninja speaking the next line in a different pose, in a different position in shot, in a different framing, or any combination of all of these.

Interestingly, Nichols and Sarine do not use this effect very often in the first ever video on their channel. This, again, indicates an evolution in production techniques as the vlogger explores the new moving image genre and learns from other creatives. In Nichols and Sarine’s subsequent videos, the deliberately more exaggerated and obvious instances of the vlogging jump cut create an up-tempo pace and increase the drama in the performance. These serve to maintain the audience’s interest, which is arguably why the creators embraced this technique as the ongoing style for the show. The synchrony and flow of the overarching monologue, of course, continues to hold the whole episode together.
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Crowd accelerated innovation (CAI)

YouTube vloggers learn from each other: this is the core of what Chris Anderson, founding editor of *Wired*, calls crowd accelerated innovation (CAI). Through CAI, “ideas spawn from earlier ideas, bouncing from person to person and being reshaped as they go” [49]. It is the swift growth of knowledge and/or skill due to the ease and speed with which YouTube users can create and share video content. The digitisation of the YouTube conversation provides a platform for rapid and global many-to-many participant interaction through moving image content.

Through crowd accelerated innovation on YouTube, but also within “a larger context of interpenetrating platforms”, such as Facebook and Twitter, that constitute an “ecosystem of connective media” [emphasis in original] [50], we have witnessed the rapid evolution of video blogging production techniques. These days it is common for vloggers to employ the vlogging monologue jump cut in their very first YouTube upload, for example. Also, as mentioned earlier, YouTube even contains videos detailing exactly how to jump cut vlogging monologues for best effect; that is, to maintain a level of energy while also creating a smooth flowing delivery.

In one such training video, BMAC (also known as Brian MacDuff) points out that jump cutting for vlogs is not as simple as just cutting out sections of dead air, ums, buts, and mess-ups (MacDuff, 2017). He suggests that editors slightly overlap monologue audio between one shot and another, in what is called ‘L-cut’ fashion. BMAC’s point is that this practice will make your edits sound smoother, cleaner, more professional, more polished, and also help maintain your rhythm. He even suggests that there is a “more professional” way to use the vlogging jump cut (MacDuff, 2017). This is interesting considering that, as discussed previously, the vlogging jump cut can be seen as having emerged from a culture of video production that necessarily not ‘professional’.

Of course, as Nicholas Tufnell (2013) points out, over time the practice of many of YouTube’s video bloggers has begun to enter the realm of professionalism in an effort to maximise monetisation. Though vlogging now often exhibits higher production values, better camera and audio quality, and better control of lighting, the personal direct address, authenticity, and invitation for audiences to join in the conversation still exist as comparable with vlogging’s traditional form. Though not used by every video blogger, the vlogging jump cut is still highly prevalent and still evolving.

The crowd accelerated innovation in relation to the vlogging jump cut can be seen in the recent videos of well-known ‘professional’ YouTube vlogger and bassist, Davide Biale — also known by his channel name, Davie504 (Biale, 2011). Having started his YouTube channel on 18 May 2011, Biale’s early videos were unedited shots of himself (often only a closeup on his hands) playing a variety of bass parts to music. Over time he began to use cuts in his videos to offer different visual perspectives of his playing while keeping the music continuous. Around the end of 2013, after a shout out from famous YouTube vlogger, PewDiePie [51], and a likely subsequent boost in video views, Biale began to speak in his episodes. It was here, with just over 100 videos uploaded and under 50,000 channel subscriptions, he began to employ the basic vlogging jump cut technique as used by Frank many years before.

More than six years later and Biale has uploaded 500+ videos with a cumulative total of over 800 million views and his Davie504 YouTube channel sports more than five and a half million subscribers. The production level of his videos has also greatly improved, featuring a significant increase in the frequency of vlogging jump cuts and the complexity in which they are utilized. Cuts are made after almost every spoken phrase, and in some instances every word. Sequential shots of Biale are scaled up or down (sometimes in quite extreme fashion), inverted and stretched, colour graded for dramatic effect, or any combination of these. Digital zooms are utilized in jump cut shots of Biale at a variety of zoom speeds; artificial camera shake is applied; motion graphics are employed on some jump cuts; new text is overlayed on the screen at
the cut point; and colour graded moving images are even dissolved over jump cut shots of Biale to accentuate mood.

Biale is clearly borrowing production techniques from many other YouTube influences, taking them to new heights, and making them his own. Each Davie504 video exhibits motifs and conventions that have become specific, and at times unique, to his vlogging channel. In Biale’s episodes, the vlogging jump cut once again jars at the cut point, in a deliberate, and perhaps even musical, dance of accentuation with the flowing monologue.

Conclusion

Casey Neistat’s vlogging videos are not dissimilar to Davie504’s in this way. That is, over time Neistat has explored the vlogging genre and developed his own style as a remediation of classically cinematic or televisual conventions. One fan recognises this in a comment on the Movie stars prank the press video mentioned at the beginning of this article:

This is another one of his defining ones ... and not least a great example of his master editing with his signature cut-off sentences. It makes it so much more dynamic, not having to listen to what you already have figured out, or words that slower [sic] the tempo without adding much. (Du de Normaundie, 2016)

Neistat has adopted the vlogging jump cut in his own way — by regularly jump cutting his own monologue mid-sentence. It is as if he is exemplifying his creative theme of ‘show, don’t tell’ via the editing motif.

Video blogs are rich in this type of experimentation with, and adaptation of, more traditional forms of moving image grammar — such as the jump cut. Creators as ‘serious amateurs’ revel in the lack of rigid conventions that apply to their genre and the communicative affordances latent within their chosen platform’s technological substrate. They learn from the huge online archive of past and recent works on platforms such as YouTube, and promptly publish the results of their experimentation to allow others to critique, discuss, learn, and expand upon. The real challenge here will be documenting and debating the growth and progress of online moving image culture through more traditional, academic, modes and mediums — but I still suggest that this must be done.

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Notes


5. Burgess and Green, 2009b, p. 53.


30. Burgess, 2009a, p. 94.

References


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