Accounting the ‘self’: From diarization to life vlogs

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Abstract
The diarization of the self emerged through historically contingent social and economic relations and the practice of accounting as an integral aspect of industrialization and capitalism. From the journal to new media technologies, the recording of everyday life is about the governance and construction of the self, illuminating the ‘everyday’ as a salient dimension of sense-making in relation to the wider world. Accounting the self today has gained renewed prominence through new media technologies and social media platforms and its increasing incorporation into everyday life, inviting a public interface. The teleology of older forms of accounting the self (i.e. the journal) to new media technologies needs to be seen through a continuum in which sociocultural and economic forces enmesh with the medium of communication as a tool of self-expression to capture the self in its diurnal mode. This article utilizes Raymond Williams’ notion of cultural materialism, in linking the diary as a modern technology of self-expression with vlogs in the post-digital terrain wherein material practices shed light onto our lifeworlds construed through the resources available within material and immaterial infrastructures, offering both agency and abstraction by capital. As such, the manifest cultural form is intimately mediated by cultural technologies.

Keywords
Cultural materialism, diaries, diarization, digital media, digital self, life vlogs, self-production, video-sharing platforms

Introduction
The accounting of the self in modernity is an acutely political and politicized project intimately enmeshed with notions of temporality, domesticity, gender, identity and morality, coalescing with new types of audit systems for accounting time, profits and performance in society. The self and its construction through material and cultural artefacts can be mapped through the rise of literacies, technologies, spirituality, industrialization and the increasing role of the state and methodologies to
audit productivity, progress and performativity. If capitalism narrated the self through material modes, digital technologies and their assemblage with the data economy remake the self through its immateriality online premising the self as a fluid entity for exchange and commodification while illuminating our cultural and material practices with new media technologies.

Today the narration of everyday life through vlogs is a resonant aspect of social media and video-sharing platforms. As a form of online publishing, vlogs (video logs) allow anyone with Web access and simple video production tools available on most smartphones to produce and post content online. Vlogs constitute user-generated content that can be shared on video-sharing platforms, and they encompass a wide range of content including personal online diaries. Most vlogs are authored by individuals and focus on personal themes (Nardi et al., 2004). In employing the term ‘life vlogs’ in this article, I elucidate the genre of personal online diaries and the sharing of these on public video-sharing sites.

Vlogs, as the visual multimedia format of life blogs, often chronicle people’s experiences through both the banal and life’s passage through time. This article looks at how the narration of the self through quotidian frames has become a site of individual and collective meaning-making, consumerism and capitalism through interactive platforms. These vlogs, as part of a wider popular culture, invite scrutiny into people’s everyday lived experiences, showcasing their private lives in a public platform. As a cultural form, they constitute a complex interplay of social norms, self-construction and a conflicted relationship with the notion of the ‘authentic self’ and temporality in accounting the self. This article asserts that vlogs can be best contextualized as artefacts for the representation of the self and in imbricating the social through material practices by placing these within a historic continuum of older formats such as diaries and journals which emerged through a specific social and economic order and with the availability of a communication medium (i.e. printed journals or diaries) for recording the everyday and accounting the self. Accounting of the self has evolved through social conditions and modes of production and communication technologies. As such, vlogs stand within a long trajectory as a cultural artefact for self-accounting and writing the self into the world while being appropriated by capital online where the self is transacted as a commodity of exchange.

Raymond Williams’ cultural materialism locates culture within the ambit of material practices whereby the most mundane and humdrum happenings of everyday life are both grounded in the material world such that the social context and its material practices are inextricably bound. For Williams, material culture and the economy are entwined, making culture and its relationship to the material world an important area of scrutiny. This article seeks to situate vlogs within changing social, economic and cultural landscapes in the new millennium and through the emergence of new forms of literacies and communicative platforms in accounting the self. It argues that vlogs as cultural artefacts need to be conjoined with older forms of diarization of everyday life predating Web 2.0 or the semantic Web filled with text. Beyond reviewing vlogs through the conflicted private–public binaries, vlogs need to be scrutinized through a modernist project of accounting the self and the ways in which the self and temporality and its attendant mortality have been accounted for in human history in conjunction with the invention and appropriation of communication media. Modes of accounting for the self are also equally enmeshed with capital and its imperative to monetize the private realms of the everyday, the shifting patterns of labour and leisure and equally our changing conceptions of sociality and our notions of private and public realms. It equally highlights the intense intimacy of capital with our private realms, in terms of its metaphysical or existential realities, particularly in the era of the digital. Our lifeworlds today are increasingly enmeshed with digital platforms recording our movements, thoughts, articulations and
transactions. In the process, we are inscribed through technologies which record and audit the self through visible and invisible infrastructures.

**The diary as a cultural artefact through time**

Before exploring vlogs within cultures of networked sociality, I want to review the artefact of the diary within a historical context where I illuminate the close relationship between the diary as a material practice and its reflection of social relationships, the intimacy with the private realms of ordinary lives and its convergence with the market as a medium of communication. Ordinary as opposed to the extraordinary relates to ‘everyday life’ as a sociological enquiry in which routines and patterns are inscribed through the perfunctory lifeworlds of people in their domestic habitat. In its banality resides the ‘life-world which provides the ultimate ground from which spring all our conceptualizations, definitions and narratives’ (Featherstone, 1992: 160). In succinct terms, in defining its intangible quality, Featherstone surmises this as the ‘mundane ordinary world untouched by great events and the extraordinary’ (1992: 161). Its temporal immediacy and immersion become defining characteristics in sustaining spheres of repetitive activities in our interior worlds which sustain a wider world out there. Recording technologies facilitated the reflexivity of the self within the bind of the ‘mundane everyday’ and the quest to account for it.

Peter Gay (1986: 36) terms the 19th century as ‘the golden age of the diary’, impressing the diary as an almost obligatory companion for a class endowed with leisure such that these instruments of accounting evolved from perfunctory records to subjective narratives and an embodiment of temporality as an organizing principle of modernity (see also Paperno, 2004). During the European Renaissance after the 15th century, the early modern diary was an artefact which stood for convergence of capitalism, individualism and Christianity wherein personal accounts of the self, finances and emotions were influenced by both practices of bookkeeping and critical religious self-examination on a daily basis to account for the self (see Didier, 1976; McCarthy, 2000; Ransel, 2004). In the 17th and 18th centuries, Ransel (2004: 596) points out that for the Puritans in England and the Moravian Brethren diaries became records of an individual’s successes and failures in meeting the moral standards of their religious orders. Conversely, in the age of science, the diary converged with the rise of the middle class to emerge as a quintessential accessory of bourgeois commitment to record love, work and friendships. Didier (1976) claims that the diary functioned as a capitalist device synchronized with increased knowledge of bookkeeping methodology and accounting theory, suspending it between one’s own morality (mediated by the vagaries of one’s affective state) and capitalist hunger for accounting materiality and temporality.

In narrating the historical emergence of the diary through project modernity, Alain Corbin (1990 [1987]: 499) co-locates it with the growing attachment to property, scientific observation and the quest for individuality or self in the late-18th and 19th centuries. As cultural artefacts through time and space, they were intimately bound with an obsession with individuality and the accounting of the self through one’s reflections. In the 20th century, the diary became ensconced within the modernist impulse for deliberate self-creation, in an aesthetic or in a political sense, without absolving the earlier meanings ascribed to it (Paperno, 2004: 563).

Even though diaries were initially published primarily for the record-keeping needs of men of commerce, the improvements in printing technology in the first half of the 19th century meant that diaries started to enter the private realm, transgressing into the feminine imagination of the self as well. The advancement of literacy and the Protestant Reformation affected the emergence of diary keeping, with literacy reaching unprecedented levels in the 16th and 17th centuries (O’Sullivan,
2005). Within the private and sacred realms, it functioned as a form of confession in the Protestant world that had rejected the demand for priestly intervention in the absolution of sin acting as a repository for self-deprecation, repentance and supplication (O’Sullivan, 2005: 6). Conversely, in the Romantic period, diary keeping became part of the exploration of the secular self, producing a friction between moralism and Christian sensibilities (Didier, 1976; Hunter, 1992: 52). Diaries assumed prominence as both regulators of behaviour and testimonies of sustained virtue with the preoccupation with the development of a sound moral character in the 19th century, particularly among the bourgeoisie. This obsession in part enacted diaries as a vital part of self-construction.

Didier equally associates the rise of the journal intime with the alienation of the individual in 19th-century bourgeois society and with the Lacanian mirror stage in which the diary assumed the role of the mirror such that identity or the sense of the self is forged. The diary advanced a template of the ‘enlightened’ self, suggesting someone who has withdrawn from the world to engage with it more meaningfully, creating a myth of ‘the inward self can be transparent to introspection’ (Rosenwald, 1987: 101). The diary symbolized fragmentation of the self rather than coherence, liberated from form and social conventions and imbuing one with the liberty to transgress into the forbidden arenas of a formalized society in constructing the self. As a repository for innermost thoughts and repressed desires and fantasies, and having a capacity for fiction, the commentaries of the self and its engagement with everyday life illuminated the Victorian obsession with individual identity, particularly among the middle class. With hired servants affording the middle class more leisure time to pursue personal interests and pleasures, diary writing emerged as a necessary ritual of the bourgeoisie moral reflexivity (O’Sullivan, 2005: 61).

The diary, as a platform for working through the identity crisis between childhood and adulthood prior to the passage into the latter (see Ransel, 2004: 596–570), encapsulated the increased development of self-consciousness and identity construction. The malleability of the diary as a tool meant that it adapted to the psychological needs of its user. Immersed through conflicts within formalized boundaries between ‘selfhood and events, subjectivity and objectivity, the private and the public, the diary forged an incestuous bind with privacy, intimacy, and secrecy’ (Paperno, 2004: 561–562).

Diaries historically, like the life vlogs of the digital era, provided a platform for accounting for people’s ordinary everyday lives, locating meaning in the insignificant details attached to the rooted dailiness of life where they functioned through the temporal frames of the everyday sustained through monotonous routines (Blanchot, 1959). Diaries, unlike vlogs which are produced to be broadcast to an audience, did not reside strictly within a private realm as a genre. They always courted the possibility of being read, this being the forbidden and sometimes erotic nature of their existence counter to the persistent myth about diaries always being private despite the implicit consciousness of being written and directed towards an audience (Mallon, 1984). Van Dijck (2004) describes the quotidian cultural practice of diary writing as a hybrid act of communication: supposedly private yet courting the possibility of transgression (and in tandem its ensuing internal crisis) through the betrayal of others reading it.

As such, the diary through its function of recording and reflection had the characteristic of imbuing social meaning to daily routines and, through them, offering a glimpse into the social and emotional world inhabited by the diarist, as assembled within these available generic and narrative possibilities. The habitual recording of expenditure and consumption provided both a narrative continuity and measure of time while enabling the diarist to retain possession and control of the self, allowing for continuous self-construction. A related phenomenon is the illusion of ‘authenticity’ and ‘immediacy’ associated with the diary predicated by the presumed presence of self and the primacy of the living moment. It inhabits the unique status of an ‘as if’ text, in which both the
writing and the reading of the text are treated as if it is capable of communicating an ‘authentic’ self and an ‘immediate’ experience (Paperno, 2004).

Diaries provide a means of writing ourselves into the world, to enter history through the social and private domains. When people ‘write themselves into their own worlds, they are also writing themselves into our world, our consciousness and conscience’ (Wahlstrom, 2012) and in this sense, the diary has a temporal significance in accounting for one’s time and a grim realization of mortality (Corbin 1990 [1987]: 498). The pledging of the self into text is somewhat representative of leaving a trace and in some manner the combating self-annihilation (Paperno, 2004: 562). For Jochen Helback, the diary possessed the capacity to serve as an instrument of self-construction, mediating between the self and the community, providing the means to adapt to the needs of a specific culture and a cultural artefact existing within the social. In linking the self to historical time, the diary enmeshes spirituality and mortality while enabling psychological introspection in the age of Enlightenment for the moral fashioning of the self (Paperno, 2004: 563). It remained a space for recording births, deaths and marriages together with mundane topics, such as weather, throughout the 19th century (O’Sullivan, 2005: 56). In essence, as O’Sullivan (2005) argues, the diary emerged as a cultural artefact in its own right in adapting to the hallmarks of modern society combining the demands of individualism, spirituality, eroticism as well as the metaphenomena of capitalism, nationalism and industrialism.

**Networked ‘sociality’**

This article began with the premise that there is a continuum between diaries and life vlogs. Diaries lapse into the multitude of demands made on the private lives of individuals and their relationship to their intimate spheres, social conventions and notions of accountability, construction of individuality and existential reality in modernity. In placing life vlogs into this continuum, I want to explore a number of metaphenomena bound with recording our lives through the screen. There is no suggestion that old modes of diarizing our lives replace new ones, but newer cultural artefacts function within a cultural and economic context in which renewed demands are placed on the self both in the public and private realms and in tandem the material and cultural practices that we employ such that these converge with the marketplace. If the diary remains as a contested liminal entity between the private and the public, life vlogs equally inhabit a complex reality in which our negotiation of the ‘private’ is nuanced, conflicted and continuously negotiated in the digital realm. I want to highlight specific issues connected with life vlogs wherein these lend to a visual culture, sociality and come to constitute a mediated cultural materialism whereby their immateriality as digital content abstracts the self as a transacted entity within the capitalist data economy, producing an intimate convergence with the marketplace.

Vlogs, unlike the diary, are visually bound, premising a screen ecology and unleashing the self as continuously constructed and transmitted as a visual artefact. Undoubtedly, the adoption of visual culture in contemporary times is part of a much broader movement within the sciences, social sciences and humanities, locating the visual as part of a general theory of communications (Mirzoeff, 1999). A wholly new status is given to the visual as a source of knowledge by many and disparate disciplines from astronomy to zoology and it equally arises from an acknowledgment that in a wholly unprecedented way people today derive meaning from all kinds of imagery as part of their everyday experiences (Duncum, 2004: 252).

Manuel Castells’ (1996) ‘network society’ premises open dynamic networked structures becoming an integral aspect of the capitalist economy with its emphasis on innovation,
globalization and decentralization. In resonance with this is Bauman’s (2000) notion of ‘liquid modernity’ in which advancing social relations is based on an exchange of data and ubiquitous co-presence through the convergence of technologies such that these may be understood as offering new ‘technologies of the self’. The emergence of the digital society based on information and networks also rests on a networked sociality characterized through shifting relations and altered forms of sociality, invoking Giddens’ (1991) notion of sociality as both distanced and immediate. A specific aspect of this individuation in postmodernity is attested through the active construction of one’s own life (Beck and Ziegler, 1997). Here, the fusing of work and play means encounters can be ephemeral yet intense reflecting the fact that individual identity increasingly depends on an awareness of the relations with others (see Wittel, 2001: 51). If the diary positioned a reality through social relationships, the vlog invokes a relationship with a consuming audience forming connections through public articulations and a ubiquitous screen culture.

Beyond metanarratives of how the self is composed and articulated through new media technologies within the social and political economy of a networked society, I want to draw attention to the notion of Raymond Williams’ ‘cultural materialism’ as something that should always be understood through its own necessary (inescapable) materiality. In tandem, literary products in their manifest diversity transpire as productions rather than as mere expressions. For Raymond Williams (1981: 12–13), particularly in his interest for an alternative to Marx’s understanding of capitalism, the emphasis remained on ‘cultural practices and cultural production as not just derived from a social order but major constituents of that social order’, stressing the social uses of material means of production from language as ‘material consciousness’ to the specific technologies of writing through to mechanical and electronic communications systems. What is equally relevant in this trope is Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’ in his articulations of culture where through a medium like the novel or the play people sought to master and absorb new experiences (Williams, 1974: 14–15). In so doing, Williams emphasized the interrelationship between technology and form and cultural formations as well as social relationships. The diary and diarization as a people’s vernacular which seizes upon material cultures and practices while relating to a wider zeitgeist of remaking the everyday and appropriating meaning and resonance from the mundane is an important site for producing the ‘social’.

Williams argued that in failing to recognize the materiality of cultural processes themselves there was a danger of positioning ‘culture’ as dependent and immaterial. Williams’ robust defence of culture and cultural production as enmeshed through labour and production economies without relegating these as secondary argued against Marxist discourses of banishing these to a ‘superstructure’. As such, the ‘cultural-materialist’ did not challenge the proposition that material forces drive history but sought to convince what may be legitimately considered material force in construing culture, and this included language, ideas, values, beliefs, stories, discourses and so on as themselves material. Williams sought not to collapse man’s capacity to make his own history through his capacity for labour alone (which Marx’s notion of historical materialism premised) but also through ‘practical consciousness’. Williams argues that ‘consciousness must be seen from the beginning as part of the human material social processes, and its products in “ideas” as much part of this process as material products themselves’ (1977: 59–60).

The cultural forms as material are evidenced in their embodiment, embeddedness and experience in human behaviour, practices and institutions, yet they should not be reduced to their material embodiment alone. The everyday practices then become a ‘realized signifying system’ (1981: 207) and these should be ‘analysed within their actual means and conditions of their production and circulation’ (1983). As such, Williams’ emphasis on the materiality of culture entailed
not only the analysis of language but also other forms of cultural production including stage, screen drama, television, the novel, advertising as well as new technologies of communication. For Williams (1981: 13), in communicative materialism, culture is imbricated as a signifying system constituting practices through which ‘a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored’. Christian Fuchs (2017) reads Williams’ position on communicative materialism as a dialectic of communication (i.e. passing of ideas, information and attitudes from person to person) and communications (i.e. systems, institutions and forms). As such, humans communicate by means of communication, whereas communications are created and recreated by human co-production and communication.

For Raymond Williams, this cultural materialism is where human agency and cultural resources collide invoking both meta-institutions, ideological formations and consciousness, calling for an exploration of the possibilities including struggles for democratization. As such, that these provide:

the connections between a political and economic formation, a cultural and educational formation, and [...] the formations of feeling and relationship which are our immediate resources in any struggle.
(Williams, 1989: 76)

In the 1850s with industrialization and shifts happening within both leisure and labour, cultural forms were undergoing forms of democratization. Richard Sennett (1976), in his assessment of theatre and the public, argues that this era of increasing democratization was brought about by the breakdown of class divisions as theatre goers wanted characters who were easy to ‘read’ unlike the urban dwellers of unknown origin and class standing that they might pass on the street outside the theatre. Sennett (1976:176) finds a curious reversal in this decade:

the divisions between mystery, illusion, and deception, on the one hand, and truth on the other were in the mid-nineteenth century drawn into a peculiar form: authentic life, which requires no effort of decoding, appeared only under the aegis of stage art.

These distinct class distinctions become remediated through the notion of increasing access to social media platforms such that the telling of everyday life in a normative sense is democratized and projected through a public space whereby both the empowered and the disempowered can chronicle their lives with a nominal digital literacy of new media technologies. Yet distinctions of class, race or social inequality do not fall away but are reabsorbed into the cultural terrain of production and consumption, with the notion of access to new platforms refracting these tensions into engagements online to amplify or to deflect these. For Raymond Williams, distinctions of class are complicated particularly in the realm of intellectual and imagination work (see Milner, 1994).

Life vlogs

The number of people who upload videos to online image/video-sharing platforms and social networks is on the rise. According to a Princeton Survey Research Associates International conducted in July 2013, the percentage of American adult Internet users who upload or post videos online has doubled from 14% in 2009 to 31% in 2013 (Purcell, 2013). A total of 41% of 18- to 29-year-old Internet users and 36% of 30- to 49-year-old Internet users post or share videos online. Video-sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo have been the main driving force in the increasing percentage of online adults who post, watch and download videos. Since 2006, the percentage of online adults who use video-sharing sites has grown from 33% to 72% in 2013. Of the 18% of online adults who share videos online that they have recorded or created themselves, the most
common subject matter is friends and family doing everyday things (58% post videos with this kind of content), followed closely by videos of themselves or others doing funny things (56%) and videos of events attended (54%). The survey also reveals that this video culture has emerged through the engagement with social networking sites with 58% watching videos on social networking sites such as Facebook.

In the digital sphere, the dominance of large corporations such as Amazon, Google, Facebook and Microsoft means that vlogs perform within the capital and data assemblages of these companies. The ubiquity of new media technologies in our everyday lives and their appropriation as material artefacts present these within a complex architecture where there is intense personalization of technologies while facilitating a direct interface with the marketplace and unknown audiences. The possibilities for intense personalization of technologies offer these as technologies of the self. It equally captures the convoluted nature of cultural materialism in which the activity self-curation on interactive, visual and mobile platforms narrates the self as an agile, fluid and outward-facing entity with an ability to project beyond its immediate surrounds. This is resonant with Raymond Williams’ notion of ‘mobile privatization’ that television brought distant worlds into our immediate private realms. The comingling of the self with a wider ecology of infrastructure makes intimate the relationship with capital while scrambling this intimacy through the hidden modes and operations in which it re-abstracts and tracks the self and its movements.

Given the vast power and oligopoly of digital giants (i.e. Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook), cultural materialism seeks possibilities without foreclosing them through the economic paradigms alone such that invisible labour, surveillance or the commodification of the human converge with the construction of the self. The appropriation of new technologies in our intimate spheres to account for the self invokes ‘structures of feeling’, which Williams refers (1977: 32) to as the ‘meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt’ integrating the affective elements of consciousness and relationships and constructing the world we experience both individually and socially. This notion of cultural materialism may seem dissonant with the virtual digital economy constituted through its immateriality and where invisibility of human extractions (i.e. artificial intelligence, algorithms, data mining, profile building, machine learning, etc.) conjoins with the sensuous realm of networked sociality and lived or shared experiences. In effect, it reiterates Williams’ idea of cultural material practices as production and reproduction of the social, thus reiterating the vitality of materiality within these immaterial renderings of the digital economy.

As such, the institutions of communication as ‘relations between people in the society are often seen most easily by looking at the institutions of communication’ and because ‘it is through communication systems that the reality of ourselves, the reality of our society, forms is interpreted’ (Williams, 1983: 22–23). In this sense, it is not seen as secondary to the forces and relations of production, but delineating that culture and communication as material, as they require means of communication from the use of language to advanced technologies, and as such these constitute both the productive forces and the social relations of production. Equally it reiterates the sensuous activities of humanity as generative bot foreclosed through the exploitative or extractive alone.

**Placing vlogs and diaries in a continuum of social production**

Published diaries became popular in the 1820s and their numbers reached a high level in the 1830s staying steady until 1860 when they started to decline (Carter, 1997: 252). Raymond Williams notes that with industrialization, privacy acquired an oppositional shift to the public and
impersonal forces of capitalism. In Williams’ interpretation, privacy is seen as a withdrawal from the impersonal forces of capitalism:

in its positive senses [privacy] is a record of the legitimation of a bourgeois way of life: the ultimate generalized privilege, however abstract in practice, of seclusion and protection from others (the public); of lack of accountability to ‘them’; and of related gains in closeness and comfort. (cf. Carter, 1997: 243)

Mary Jean Corbett (1992), in her exegesis of Romantic literary subjectivity, argued that 19th-century writers fought against the separation of the product from the producers. This withdrawal of the Romantics in some way converged with the artefact of the diary as it premised the production of an authentic self through introspection away from the public. During this period, diaries were conceived within the ambit of the marketplace, ironically through their withdrawal from public. This despite the fact that the diary entailed labour in the context of industrial capitalism (Rosenwald, 1987).

It being somewhat distanced from the marketplace also provided a means to imagine the labour invested in a diary as an alternative form distinct from the competitive marketplace which may not be economically compensated and where the author could keep the commodity within her own control. As such, diary writing and its moral labour was inserted into a social imaginary of being distant from the marketplace and somewhat unspoilt and authentic due to the commercial element being kept at bay (Carter, 1997: 253–254). Concerns about these private artefacts being permeable to the marketplace brought forth an anxiety to insert an imagined boundary between the private and the public between roughly 1820 and 1850 (Carter, 1997: 254).

Eva Meyer (1987) conceives the diary as a permeable entity between published and unpublished work, placing it in a continuum inserting the circulation of the diary in the 19th century within the family circle meant that it could not be categorically classified as private. The privacy and intimacy of the diary remained a contested ideal. According to Peter Gay (1986), adult power to permeate the intimate spheres of children’s lives such as ‘opening letters, superintend their reading, chaperon their visitors or inspect their underwear’ meant that brutal intrusion to children’s private realms can be interpreted as an ‘arrogant and at times prurient invasion of young lives’. Diaries as such functioned as tools for regulation and control and often reflected the unresolved tensions and controversies, initiating demands for privacy against intrusive parents. The self was constructed in the diary against these demands (Hunter, 1992: 53). Monitored through the discipline of the family and domestic setting and its virtues, diary writing was an internalized discipline of the self, akin to Catholic confessional but also a constructive ‘technique of the self’ for the young female diarists imbuing strict moral codes along with a platform to renegotiate through one’s thoughts and reflections.

Unlike diaries, which occupy a contested ambit between the private and the public, vlogs, through their visual presentation, invite the self to be screened and validated through a public gaze. The marketplace, marketization and the monetization of the self-accounting rather than through the notion of self-withdrawal from the public to enable intense retrospection. The ordinary lives of people and their quotidian accounts straddle a screen space which was once given over to stars and celebrities, integrating a democratic possibility of ordinary people acquiring celebrity status by being ‘themselves’. The authentic self is then validated, surveilled and regulated through the gaze, commentary and endorsement of the public in terms of
authenticity and popularity through data traffic rather than the moral introspection which the diary
demanded.

Rather than establishing a definition of what the self was or ought to be, the diary initiated
discourses about the self. If the affordance of the diary meant it became a tool for constructing the
self through the realms of domestic and social conventions, vlogs are about personal orientations,
affective labour and equally self-representation where recording immediacy of experience entails a
public, immersing the self through the demands of the marketplace without foreclosing it solely to
discussions of whether one is compensated for the labour invested as a commercial entity for
exchange. Vlogs of the everyday and mundane seek to impress through the resonance of the
perfunctory where banal routines, consumerism, life hacks, the trivial and life journeys are wit-
nessed through the gaze of others as a ‘structure of feeling’. Here, interactive technologies provide
a platform to absorb and relate to new experiences of the ordinary man or woman. The interactivity
of vlogs, the sense of immediacy, the accelerated temporality through upload time and its reso-
nance within the everyday are about both collective and individual meaning-making in a hyper-
connected but lonely world where traffic of audience consumption and gaze are part of this cultural
materialism.

If diaries straddled within the realms of the virtuous, articulated through critical self-
introspection or as an escape from social conventions proscribed by class and moral codes of
family life, vlogs are subsumed through presentational cultures, preoccupation with individuality,
hyper-connectivity and ubiquity of technologies where consumption through the screen and the
ability to reach an audience through video-sharing platforms imposes new conventions and
moralties of showcasing life, children, private domestic realms and ‘performing’ pets to unknown
strangers. The self is positioned within the aestheticization of the everyday, its temporality and its
recognition of the self as an offering and invitation for others to partake. Audiences’ relationships
to life vlogs and life journeys become part of the shared relationships while reproducing the ‘social
and society’ through these conventions and norms which emerge through these sites. The recording
of the self as object and subject in these platforms is both about personal meaning-making and
collective relationships which emerge with these acts of sharing, while implicating a bigger data-
driven digital economy which thrives on our conflicted notions of privacy, user-generated content,
invisible labour and affective communities. Here, the screen is perceived as a space that is
amenable to the ordinary woman and her articulations.

As auditing and recording instruments, diaries have the potential to be transgressed or reach the
marketplace as published material. In contrast, vlogs broker the self as entities which are intimately
placed within the marketplace. The commodification of the self and its economic value derived
through its postings online means it is transacted as an entity constructed through the affective
labour of the self and its consuming communities. The construction of the self through public
consumption and abstraction through capital means that the self is equally monitored and sur-
veilled through public gaze while its value is extracted from this process of self-construction.

The conjoining of material practices of new media technologies with the immateriality of the
virtual world means that the self is intimately aligned with the labour and production practices of
the marketplace (or communications as wider modes of production which assemble our modes of
communication). This direct and much more intimate relationship with the marketplace means that
the materiality of cultural practices is subsumed through a bigger machinery of immateriality such
that sensuous labour is both abstracted and the self is performed through platforms of consumption.
If diaries as artefacts of self-making contained their own rhetorical drama and devices for remaking
the banal of the everyday, vlogs perform the everyday through visual cultures which seek to
reproduce cultural codes, conventions and consumerism while seeking to emphasize vlogs as individual articulations and affective labour. Here, vlogs enter a realm of negotiation with both sociality and privacy where the self constantly negotiates degrees of intimacy and sociality, and the projection of these onto the screen. This screened self then performs through individual and collective conventions of what can be performed and presented on the screen while leveraging on individuality and ‘the personal’ as a resource and social capital for sharing. If diaries wrote implicitly to an audience, the ubiquitous use of technologies in our everyday life invokes these audiences as real interactive entities who can be addressed and can speak back to us.

Conclusion
This article reviewed the emergence of the diary and life vlogs (nominally conceived as two ends of a spectrum) within a continuum as artefacts for accounting the self, prefacing the relationship between humanity, its selection of cultural forms and cultural technologies. In doing so, it sought to adduce the notion of diarization through technologies as not deterministic but invoking a wider interplay of relationships between the social, economic and everyday life as a realm of intense meaning-making. Technological artefacts as sites of culture and social productions are as such enmeshed with the wider socio-economic structures in which the ‘social’ emerges. This technological environment provides the common resources for the emergence of a cultural terrain in enacting human agency, creativity, affective labour and social relations. The self as a construct throughout modernity straddles both the imperatives for self-introspection and its constant entanglements with the marketplace, expressing itself through selective technological forms of communication as cultural resources. The diary and the life vlog are narrated within this continuum, premising these not through the primacy of capitalist agenda or their modes of accumulation alone but their interplay with cultural forms which are tethered to possibilities as sites of culture, resistance and agency. Through common resources, we enact and construe our struggles for individual and collective meaning-making, democratization and constructing identities and negotiating realms for experiencing renewed culture of a period or in Raymond Williams’ conceptualization as ‘structure of feeling’. It is through the entanglement between cultural production and digital infrastructure of extractive capital, the sensory production of the everyday life vlogs need to be reviewed. These immaterial modes of production reveal both the dominance of the capitalist agenda but equally its affordances as common resources for resistance and self-expression, implicating the construction of the self as a complex interchange of social and economic relations in which culture accrues, denoting the intimate and incestuous coupling between cultural form and cultural technology, and in tandem communication as culture and communication as social relations of production.

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