‘A Couple of These Videos Is All You Really Needed to Get Pumped to Skate’: Subcultural Media, Nostalgia and Re-Viewing 1990s Skate Media on YouTube

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Abstract
The reappearance of VHS skateboarding movies produced during the 1990s on YouTube presents a timely opportunity to examine how the subcultural identities of former skateboarders are reassessed in later life. Drawing on subcultural studies and theories of mediated memory, this article analyses comments made by viewers of YouTube re-postings of 411 Video Magazine, an era-defining skateboard movie series of the 1990s. The analysis suggests that re-viewing content of once cherished VHS tapes affords former skaters a nostalgic moment of reconnection with their youth involving a combination of three forms of nostalgia: subcultural nostalgia, biographical nostalgia, and format nostalgia. For many viewers, re-viewing skate videos retrospectively recognizes the formative role skateboarding played in shaping their identity and also allows an appraisal of both the past subcultural formation and the media format through which its values were expressed and communicated.

Keywords
Ageing, memory, nostalgia, skateboarding, subcultural media, subculture, YouTube

Introduction
With its sustained focus on youthful resistance (Blackman, 2014; Hall & Jefferson, 1976) subcultural theory proved well equipped to understand the emergence of

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skateboarding as a subcultural phenomenon in the closing decades of the 20th century. With its associations of opposition to authority (Németh, 2006), risk-taking, and social rebellion (Atencio et al., 2009), skateboarding has been understood as an example of resistant and creative youth subculture (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2019). Indeed, in spite of achieving the mainstream acceptance indicated by global commercial success and Olympic inclusion (Batuev & Robinson, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2021), skateboarding retains many features of a thriving youth subculture. In recent years there has been a growing cultural reverence for, and glamourization of, the formative years of skateboarding, with ‘a lot of skateboarders, mostly the older set, have been revisiting history, drunk with nostalgia’ (Hamm, 2004, p. 11). At a time when there is a burgeoning cultural fascination with nostalgic visions of the past (Holdsworth, 2001; Niemeyer, 2014), films such as Lords of Dogtown (Hardwicke, 2005), All This Mayhem (Martin, 2014), and Mid90s (Hill, 2018) give skateboarding a cinematic treatment that invokes an era in which skateboarding was emerging as an immersive subculture that gave its youthful participants a source of meaning and collective identity.

Many of the core concerns of subcultural studies—such as style, resistance, identity, and authenticity (Williams, 2007)—are bound up with how the discipline has conceptualized youth. Yet, more recent understandings of youth as non-linear and involving transitional stages (Pollock, 2008), periods of exploration, experimentation, and ‘becoming’ (Worth, 2009); and ‘complex, nuanced and multiple orientations towards the future’ (Woodman, 2011, p. 126) make a binary distinction between rebellious youth and routine adulthood questionable. It is therefore of interest to understand how the ‘live-for-the-moment ideology’ of late 20th century lifestyle subcultures (Williams, 2011), such as skateboarding, play out as participants transition first into ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2007), then middle age, and beyond. For many older participants in youth subculture a sense of attachment to the subculture may remain long after direct involvement has ceased. Feelings of nostalgia which ‘may be intrinsic to the life-experience of individuals, as they go through the shifting perspectives of childhood and adulthood’ (Chase & Shaw, 1989, p. 15), may therefore be seen as a significant phenomenon central to understanding the cultural significance of skateboarding.

The address this topic, the subject of this research is the reappearance of VHS skateboarding movies produced during the 1990s and now digitized and posted on platforms such as YouTube. This recirculation of historical materials as ‘digitized artefacts’ afford viewers ‘their own generationally situated memories of the past and their links with the present’ (Bennett & Rogers, 2016, pp. 112–113). The reappearances of past era skate media therefore present a timely opportunity to examine how the subcultural identities of former skateboarders are revisited and reassessed in later life. Drawing on subcultural theory, but adding scholarship on nostalgia and collective memory (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009), this article analyses comments made by viewers of YouTube re-postings of 411 Video Magazine, an era defining USA-produced skateboard movie series of the 1990s and early 2000s. Comments on posted videos include candid personal reflections where viewers reflect on participation in the sport as being bound up with adolescent friendships and freedoms now lost to post-subcultural adulthood and conformity (Haenfler, 2013).
This article contributes to recent discussions about ageing and subcultural belonging (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2013). It does so by making original connections with emergent debates relating to media and collective memory. In particular, by drawing on the concept of nostalgia, the article adds to current scholarship on skateboarding by examining how former skateboarders enact meaningful, if romanticized, connections with subcultural media, and how platforms such as YouTube provide the ‘reused and reusable materials’ that facilitate the ongoing formation of collective memory (Irwin-Zarecka, 2017, p. 7). The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, recent advances in understanding how subcultural participation may, or may not, be carried from youth into adult life is reviewed followed by a discussion of recent work on media and memory. Then, following a Methods section which provides details of the research undertaken and a brief discussion of the significance of YouTube as a site for social and cultural knowledge production, the findings are presented in three sections. These relate to three expressions of nostalgia identified in the data: subcultural nostalgia relating to recollections of the skate subculture during the era depicted in the videos sampled; biographical nostalgia relating to the personal reminiscences and how these appear to represent moments of self-reflection on both past youth and the transition to adulthood; and finally, format nostalgia concerning memories relating to ‘re-viewing’ analogue format skate media in the digital era via the YouTube platform.

Growing Up, Growing Old, and Growing Out of Subcultural Participation

Skateboarding now has a relatively lengthy and increasingly well charted history (Borden, 2019). From its emergence in the US West Coast of the 1960s the sport, and its associated lifestyle and subcultural aesthetic, and values have spread internationally and has received widespread recognition and acceptance (Batuev & Robinson, 2017; Thurnell-Read, 2021). Most subcultures are characterized by a relatively strict and well-policed boundary between insiders and outsiders (Williams, 2011). In skateboarding subcultures, this boundary has become defined by the commitment shown by insiders to a skate practice marked by creativity, cooperation and commitment to the embodied experience of skateboarding (Bäckström & Sand, 2019; Dupont, 2014). Thus, while it is now widely accepted that ‘there is no single subcultural way of being’, skateboarding involves participants actively committing to and performing an identifiable skater subcultural identity centred on shared values, meanings, and symbolism (Dupont, 2020, p. 649). These shared meanings connect participants and provides a collective orientation, shaping what is valued and seen as important to the subcultural group. Thus, while subculture has been widely contested—and alternative concepts such as ‘scenes’, ‘neo-tribes’, and ‘lifestyles’ have all been proposed (Bennett, 2011)—skateboarding has, throughout its history, regularly been described as subcultural by both participants and scholars.

Subcultural theory, and cultural studies more generally, has a long-held tendency to privilege youth as a period of resistance and young people as active agents of new culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). It is therefore assumed, often, that subcultural participation correlates with youth and young adulthood and that a subsequent
withdrawal from subcultural involvement parallels a transition to adulthood and an eventual embrace of conformity (Haenfler, 2013; Jenks, 2004). With subcultures such as skateboarding often fixated with youthful bodies and qualities associated with youth such as rebelliousness and risk-taking, and because skateboarding is an intrinsically physical and embodied activity (Bäckström & Sand, 2019; Borden, 2001; Woolley & Johns, 2001), it is salient to consider how attachments to skate subculture may not be maintained into middle age inactivity. Further, given the fact that skateboarding subculture was and still is a male-dominated subculture worldwide (Bäckström & Nairn 2018; Willing et al. 2019), it is important to understand how the association with masculine ideals of youthful virility, competence, and heroism makes a perhaps uneasy transition into older age (Spector-Mersel, 2006).

There was a long-held tendency for ‘conceiving of enduring youth cultural involvement as a simple continuation of adolescence or refusal of adulthood’ (Hodkinson, 2013, p. 14). However, recent academic attention has turned to the various ways in which subcultural affiliations and identifications are carried into and maintained in later life via complex negotiations and adaptations (Hodkinson, 2016). Studies of ageing punks (Bennett, 2006; Way, 2020), goths (Hodkinson, 2011), and ravers (Gregory, 2012) have shown how involvement in subcultures and alternative lifestyles in youth can continue to ‘actively influence or shape subsequent biographical trajectories’ well into later life (Bennett, 2013, p. 2). Way (2020), for example, found the ageing body to be an important site for negotiated continued subcultural identities in older punk women. Further still, as Bennett & Hodkinson (2012, p. 3) argue, ‘certain key elements of youth culture have expanded and extended in ways that increasingly have become more compatible with adult lives’. For example, Wheaton’s (2017, p. 111) study of older surfers shows that ‘people’s leisure and lifestyle habits remain “youthful” for longer with groups of older men and women sustaining or creating new and meaningful identities via immersion in forms of serious leisure associated with youth’. Alternatively, where participation has entirely ceased, subcultural affiliations can remain part of one’s identity when they are perceived as having shaped one’s life course and influenced one’s values (Bennett, 2013; Gregory, 2012).

Such developments are relevant to the study of skateboarding, where important recent work by O’Connor (2018) and Willing et al. (2019) has examined the experiences of older active skateboarders. While the symbolic and aesthetic alignment of skateboarding with ideals of youthful physicality remains potent, ‘it is apparent that many never gave up skateboarding in their youth’ (O’Connor, 2018, p. 926) and that those older skaters who remain active deploy ‘subcultural capital flagging that they are legitimate skaters, despite their slowness and struggles’ (Willing et al., 2019, p. 511). Elsewhere, Snyder (2012) explores the trajectories of skateboarders into careers in creative occupations, such as photography and film production, that actively build on and continue their subcultural involvement into adulthood. In contrast, however, this article is concerned with former skaters who no longer participate but who appear to make use of skate media to retain some form of connection with the subculture which, as the analysis below will demonstrate, find expression in feelings of nostalgia for past subcultural participation during the formative years of adolescence. Nostalgia therefore appears to lend an important conceptual tool to understanding the temporality of subcultural affinities and their
re-evaluation in later life, as explored here in the case of re-viewing ‘old’ skate videos in the present.

**Media, Memory and Nostalgia**

Nostalgia ‘deals with positive or negative relations to time and space’ and ‘is related to a way of living, imagining and sometimes exploiting or (re)inventing the past, present and future’ (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 2). Notably, nostalgia is often experienced when some elements of the present are felt to be defective’ (Chase & Shaw, 1989, p. 15) and can be understood as a ‘composite framing of loss, lack and longing’ that can include ‘an awareness that we have changed since then’ (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 117). Thus, as Wilson (2015, p. 490) suggests, ‘nostalgia is not a mere passive longing for the past, but a potentially dynamic vehicle for (re)envisioning and (re)creating various pasts and futures’. Thinking critically about nostalgia, then, also involves attempting to understand the conditions under which ‘communities of nostalgia’ are formed (Cross, 2015) and how these can involve both personal and collective memories on past cultural practices.

The formation and purpose of personal and collective memory is now a long-established field of academic study (Halbwachs, 1992). However, it is mainly focused on popular culture and mass media (Hoskin, 2004), with television in particular being understood as part ‘a system of everyday memory-making within and in relation to the home and the family’ (Holdsworth, 2011, p. 3). This emphasis on mass media as the primary site for the formation of collective memory (Misztal, 2003), may seem to exclude the presence of subcultural memories which, by definition, stand at some distance from the institutions of the dominant culture. That the conceptual advances made in the field of memory studies have rarely been applied to youth subcultures is surprising, given the vibrancy with which many subcultures create and maintain their own collective values using niche subcultural media, much of which, as we shall see, is finding new modes of presentation in the digital media era. Memory, therefore, is ‘a complex, mutually shaping mixture of what is private to oneself and what is shared with others’ (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 17) and, as such, we can assume that memories of involvement in an immersive subculture, such as skating, may offer vital insights into both personal and collective meanings and experiences of subcultural participation.

The mediatization of skateboarding has always played a fundamental role in the spread of the sport and has become a frequent topic of academic interest. Borden’s (2001, p. 6) ground-breaking book on skateboarding took as its source material archives of magazines such as *Thrasher* and the UK’s *Sidewalk Surfer*. Skate magazines (Borden, 2001; Wheaton & Beal, 2003), and more recently social media sites such as *Instagram* (Dupont, 2020), are therefore understood as vehicles for communicating the shared norms and values used to support skater identities (Encheva et al., 2013; Wheaton & Beal, 2003) and as valuable artifacts in capturing the now lengthy history involving multiple generations of practitioners and a fluid and evolving culture (Lombard, 2016). Put simply, as Snyder (2012, p. 326) notes, skateboarding ‘sustains itself and progresses through the documentation of skateboard tricks disseminated through subculture media like magazines and videos’.
Skate media of various ages might now be viewed as an ‘infrastructure’ of collective memory (Irwin-Zarecka, 2017), the analysis of which can inform understandings of the evolving social and cultural dynamics of skateboarding.

In the Internet era, subcultural scenes may be established and maintained across localities and through and within virtual spaces (Bennett & Peterson, 2004) and, further still, subcultural communities can create identities and maintain memories with an ease previously unknown. As such, online forums can strengthen offline subcultural association (Bennett, 2004; Hodkinson, 2003), meaning that the Internet has emerged as an important space in which subcultural attachments are established (Williams, 2006) and hierarchies of status and legitimacy maintained (Williams, 2011, p. 133). Digital media, in particular, has brought to the fore the manner in which media materials can contribute to the formation of collective memories, with cultural fragments being revived digitally and their meaning and purpose recast anew through digital recirculation. Further, the advent of digital and Internet-based channels of media production and distribution ‘have increased our ability to store and transmit memory, allowing more freedom and creative possibilities’ (Misztal, 2003, p. 48). For example, Garde-Hansen et al. (2009, p. 5) argue that we might now speak of ‘digital memory’ as involving ‘a longing for memories, for capturing, storing, retrieving and ordering them’. Perhaps most relevant to the current study, Jacobson (2020) explores how middle-aged graffiti artists construct and sustain both their personal biographical trajectories and collective subcultural memories through the conversations taking place in a series of Internet podcasts. This suggests that there is considerable scope for analysing the role of subcultural media in both collective and personal memory formations and that where digital platforms such as YouTube appear to provide renewed access to subcultural media of the past, there is also scope for new and interesting reflections on the development of subcultural practice and belonging.

**Context and Methods**

To explore the varied meanings of watching ‘old’ skate media in the present, the focus of this article is a qualitative content analysis of comments made by viewers of postings of *411 Video Magazine* on YouTube (Miller, 2018). Starting in 1993, the *411 Video Magazine* skate video series was produced in the USA and released on VHS tape in a ‘magazine’ format several times a year to showcase professional skaters and profile city skate spots and competitions primarily in the USA, but also latterly featuring emerging skate locations in Europe and around the world. However, the VHS format could be traded and borrowed, damaged and lost, or simply re-watched into oblivion, creating a situation of scarcity where after some time few working copies remained in use or circulation. In recent years, surviving VHS tapes have therefore regained value both as collectors’ items sold via sites such as eBay and as source material for digitized content uploaded by collectors to YouTube and other online media platforms. As the following analysis will show, the comments section of such posts provides rich textual material relating to the engagement with what might now be considered vintage subcultural media content by former participants.

The approach adopted therefore concurs with Pietrobruno’s (2013, p. 1262) interpretation of YouTube as a ‘participatory and interactive archive’, where
materials are shared amongst communities of shared interests. Following Garde-Hansen et al. (2009, p. 14), who assert that YouTube viewing practices may involve ‘reformulating, reformatting, recycling, returning and even re-remembering other media’, the research the roles played by such digital content in mediating between past and present. On YouTube, therefore, content is circulated, valued, and engaged with according to not just the conventions of the platform, but ‘its relevance to the everyday lives’ of viewers (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 57). The selection and posting of 1990s skate videos, and the responses they elicited, can be understood as part of a process of ‘social archiving’ where the value of traditional media materials as being worthy of safekeeping ‘is to a certain degree determined by users rather than by a central authority’ (Pietrobruno, 2013, p. 1261). As such, it is possible to infer from viewer comments the values placed on the material itself and the associated act of re-viewing. Indeed, as is shown below, a central theme identified in the analysis is the dialogue between memories of original viewing of VHS tapes and the present ‘re-viewing’ of the same content, in digitized and now once again accessible form.

The analysis presented in this article is based on a sample made of 41 separate YouTube posts consisting of full length 411 Video Magazine editions and several ‘Best of’ compilation editions originally released in the 1990s. Where possible, a post for each ‘edition’ of the series was identified and multiple posts of the same edition were included where they occurred. For each post, the comments section was copied in its entirety on the day of sampling (15 March 2018) and stored offline. The highest recorded comments total for a single video post was 93 and the lowest 1, with an average of 18.2 user comments per post. These files where then entered into NVivo 12 and a thematic coding was conducted (Gibbs, 2018). Through this process, initial codes were arranged into several thematic groups with themes relating to subjects such as ‘subcultural identity’, ‘age and ageing’, and ‘memories and nostalgia’. These were then structured into analytical categories in dialogue with key literature drawn from subcultural studies, media studies, and memory studies. In what follows, comments are presented verbatim, including typographical errors, misspellings, and slang terminology where used. The identities of commentators were inferred from a combination of the profile names and pictures and, primarily, the style and content of the comment text, where, as will be shown, frequent reference to age, time, and locality were clear. The profile names and pictures of individual commentators, however, are not included here to retain a level of anonymity. Whilst this approach carries certain limitations, principally the reliance on comment content for implied geographical and social context of the commentator, the analytical focus is here on the various ways in which old skate media, now digitized and widely accessible, plays a role in the formulation of subcultural memories and the mediation of temporalities of past and present. Further limitations and scope for further research are considered in the concluding section of the article.

‘This Is True Pure Glimpse into Skating Culture Unlike Any Other’: Residual Authenticity and Subcultural Nostalgia

As in many subcultures, skateboarders have been shown to engage in the performance and negotiation of an authentic subcultural identity (Dupont, 2014). This shared skater identity is enacted ‘through a combination of style of dress, musical preferences
and the activity of skateboarding itself” and calls on participants to use approved terminology and espouse shared values (Woolley & Johns, 2001, p. 215). Across the videos sampled, viewers used the accompanying comments sections to demonstrate their familiarity with such subcultural knowledge in several ways. For instance, viewers would use comments to name specific skaters, tricks, or skate spots. For example, one comment exclaimed ‘Burton Smith! nice 360 flip’, while others identified ‘Dan Parks crushing it at Skate Camp!’ or said ‘gotta love that paul shiers 360 flips!’. Such comments can show familiarity with the specifics of the subculture in terms of using correct terminology or identifying styles such as the ‘enormous pants and tiny wheel’s’ characteristic of 1990s skate style. Further, it was common for comments to pose questions and invite responses that might, for instance, help identify particular music tracks or name specific skaters and tricks executed in the videos. In such comments, we see how a kind of residual authenticity is demonstrated not through active participation in the skate subculture but through connection to the sounds, images and values of the skate subculture of the past. Such interactions appear to be between contemporaries, and only on rare occasions did what appeared to be younger skaters, not directly familiar with the 1990s skate subculture, ask questions of the older viewers.

In some comments a personal connection to the places represented in the videos is asserted. For example, one comment on a video showing a segment of footage filmed at a skate park in Huntington Beach, California recalled how the viewer ‘Lived right down the street from HB skatepark and loved watching Reynolds destroy the place when he would roll up in those days. THE BOSS’. This comment is interesting because it helps to locate the viewer in proximity to time and place as well as showing subcultural passions in recalling how he ‘loved’ watching a particular named skater perform. Such comments again indicate a desire on the part of commentators to demonstrate subcultural knowledge, here evidenced by both a familiarity with famed skate spots and an awareness of the value placed on such knowledge within the subculture (Dupont, 2014; Németh, 2006; Wooley & Johns, 2001). This concurs with O’Connor’s (2018) recent discussion of how middle-aged skateboarders can maintain respect, acceptance, and legitimacy within the skateboarding community through the deployment of ‘temporal capital’ based on protracted years of commitment to the sport. Whereas O’Connor’s (2018) participants still feel that skateboarding is ‘embedded’ in their identity through continued involvement, in contrast, the present example of former skaters using YouTube videos viewings and comments to retain some connection with the subcultural past, long after involvement has ceased.

The act of re-viewing and commenting on 1990s skate videos on YouTube, therefore, appears to be a nostalgic encounter almost exclusively directed at the past. Skate videos therefore provoked numerous nostalgic comments relating to the specific period in skate history. Specifically, as nostalgia is both spatial and temporal and feelings of nostalgia often relate to a recollection of or yearning for a particular place and time (Wilson, 2015), it is significant that the comments analysed made such little reference to contemporary manifestations of skateboarding culture. Looking back on the skating of the 1990s, comments referred to ‘Big time nostalgia from the golden era of my skating’, and labelled the videos as representing a ‘Golden Age of Skateboarding!’ and ‘a sick year for skating’. The 1990s are here depicted repeatedly as ‘the good ol days’ and a ‘great time in skateboarding’, with the decade being specifically referred to as ‘back when skating was the shit’. Video content, for many
viewers, is read as capturing a time of subcultural authenticity, and in comments such as ‘This is true pure glimpse into skating culture unlike any other’, the 1990s are depicted as a period of skating history truer to the values of the subculture than, we infer, subsequent times.

That many comments designated the moments captured on film and brought into recollection in re-viewing as being from a lost ‘golden age’ of skateboarding agrees with Strangleman’s (2007) evaluation of nostalgia as involving juxtaposition between imagined past and real, yet unsatisfying, present. Like many subcultures where commercial success and mainstream recognition brought by maturation means that in the narratives of long-term participants the earlier era is cast as a ‘pure time’ or ‘golden age’. Here the ‘freedom’ and ‘purity’ of subcultural street skating of the 1990s which venerated risk, autonomy and creativity (O’Connor, 2016) is contrasted with the contemporary sport which is readily presented as ‘packaged, marketed, pawned off to consumers of “alternative culture” ’ (Hamm, 2004, p. 11). Former skaters, therefore, valorise the skate subculture of the past that they were part of in contrast to a present skateboarding culture which they are not a part of. But neither do they declare much loyalty to the present skateboarding culture. Indeed, for one poster who suggested that ‘I think in the 90s, skaters had more passion in their skating. Skating was so fun back then!’, the subsequent growth of the skate subculture which valorized a ‘flexible and informal structure’ (Beal, 1995, p. 258) into an internationally recognized sport comes with a process of formalization and commercialization that denudes the subculture of its original vibrancy and meaning (O’Connor, 2016).

These findings demonstrate the relevance of memory and nostalgia to the study of the skate subculture, particularly where the Internet, as here, has allowed ‘like-minded’ others a means of creatively communicating subcultural identity and ‘to fashion meaningful and “authentic” identities’ (Bennett, 2004, p. 169). The analysis suggests that re-viewing 1990s skate media on YouTube allows some former skaters the chance for reflections which are steeped in a nostalgia for the subcultural past. Notably, as is often identifiable in subcultures where there may be ‘a tense contradiction between authenticity within subculture and the use of subculture as a marketable tool to make capital’ (Blackman & Kempson, 2016, p. 9), the representation of 1990s skating depicted via comments is an idealized one. Here, a skateboarding ‘truer’ to its values can be captured in posterity and relived by viewers despite their now lengthy retreat from active subcultural participation. To build upon this, the next section explores the more personal accounts of age and ageing present in many of the comments analysed.

‘I Will Always Remember and Smile Fondly upon the Memories of Being a Punk Ass Kid’: Youth, Ageing and Biographical Nostalgia

The 411 Video Magazine posted on YouTube appeared to exert an emotive power which cast some viewers back into a series of recollections. As such memories and the act of remembering were the subject of frequent comments, such as ‘Wow this brings back memories’, ‘So many memories thanks for the upload!’ and ‘brings me back...many good memories’. The temporal component of
this is significant; not only are viewers gazing on memories of the subculture as it stood in the 1990s, but they are also engaging with their own youth and subsequent biographical ageing in reflective and self-aware ways. Such comments took one of two forms. First, comments specifically mentioned life course stages such as ‘teens’ and ‘youth’. Second, and in contrast to the first, a number of comments referred directly to older age and ageing. Examples of the former include comments such as ‘So many memories from when I was 15!!!’ and ‘great memories of a lost youth’, while one commentator suggesting that the video he viewed was the ‘[f]irst ever 411 I got. Hard to believe it’s been 23 years. Wish I could still skate. Best years of my life’. As examples of the latter, comments such as ‘I feel old’, ‘I guess I’m too old to learn again now’ and ‘I feel so old, haha’ asserted an awareness of ageing.

References to age and ageing invoked adult responsibilities and ageing bodies being antithetical to the youthful practice of skateboarding. For instance, one commentator suggested that ‘Now I’m grown man with a job, I’m gonna get one before I grow old and nag at skateboarders’. Such comments often depicted the past, here chronologically marked by the age of the video, as a time of youthful simplicity in contrast with a present in which they are ‘just old and washed up’. Many comments made candid personal reflections which appeared to use the viewing of a particular video to mark the passing of time and of their own biographical ageing. As noted, this time period was framed as a simpler time, truer to the roots of the subculture but also in many such comments alluding to a perception that this period was a happier time for them personally. Such comments were often associated with freedom, friendship, and a sense of belonging. Here, the skate scene of the 1990s is a sight of fraternal belonging and, although no specific reference was found to the increasing female participation since then (Bäckström & Nairn, 2018), the invocation of adolescent friendship and shared subcultural commitment appeared to be infused with homosociality born of the ‘masculine’ coding of skate culture at the time and since (Atencio et al., 2009). Thus, the past is remembered as a time in which skating was, for participants, unproblematically a male-dominated space where the concerns and interests of young men prevailed.

Such comments, which clearly refer to youth as a life course stage associated with greater freedom and less responsibilities, resonate with Hodkinson’s (2016, p. 641) interest in ‘the development of participation in “youth” groupings as individuals become older’ which often sees involvement and belonging negotiated alongside, amongst other things, family and work responsibilities and ‘ageing bodies and identities’. Two detailed comments position both skateboarding specifically and youth in general not as being left behind but as continuing to be a meaningful referent in the present. Thus, one commentator reflected the following:

Ya know the late 1990s was the fuckin shit, I will always remember and smile fondly upon the memories of being a punk ass kid during that time, waking up every day and giving the world the finger. But getting into my 30s I look back and look at all the growing pains I had to get where I’m at today (nice material shit, wife and kids I love more than the world I’m not rich but I have it all if you know what I mean) and I’m not so sure I would go back even if I could.
Here, as Jacobson (2020) observer in relation to middle aged graffiti subcultural participants, the younger self is framed as utterly absorbed in the subcultural pursuit in contrast with the older, more self-aware and reflexive, self. This reflection on the formative influence of youth participation in the skate subculture is mirrored by another commenter who invoked a particular day in their youth where the purchase of the original VHS tape and a grizzly skate injury rub up along a painful romantic setback:

I remember this one very well, because the same day I got this, I went out skating with two friends and ate shit on an ultra-slippery ledge, resulting in some blood loss and an arm that felt like it might be fractured. I also had a date with a chick I was into that night. Only over the course of the evening she informed me I shouldn’t get any ideas because as of a week she was technically already boyfriended. Ah, the hardships of youth...

Such examples illustrate a blend of poignancy and reflection that indicates viewers using the videos to contemplate their own ageing. Scholars such as Németh (2006) have theorized street skating as a space and time of rebellion and of assertive and active embodiment of skate participation (Bäckström & Sand, 2019). Here, we see the often ironically presented contrast between youthful rebellion and the viewer’s present sedentary lifestyle where the vibrancy of urban environments, beloved by subcultural scholars (Jenks, 2004), is juxtaposed with suburban conformity and the passivity of ‘just viewing’. Further still, such comments are characterized by the valorization of a particular conception of masculine youthfulness linked to physical heroism, emotional stoicism, and, in places, heteronormative desires and expectations.

In these evidently romanticized depictions, the trappings of middle age, and middle class, conformity are offered as conceptual opposites to the freedom, rebelliousness, and machismo of youth. Such reflections are focused on a period of youth and ‘emerging adulthood’ characterized as both a time of freedom and possibilities and as a feeling being in between (Arnett, 2007). There is therefore a contrast here between nostalgia for times of permanence and stability, as that explored by Strangleman (2007), and a nostalgia for youth characterized by freedom, spontaneity, and possibilities. Formative moments are shared via comments, where one particular moment in the personal biographical past, and skateboarding more generally, are held in retrospect as having ‘influenced me in more than I could have understood at the time!’ . Youth is therefore presented as a period of ‘becoming’ (Worth, 2009), and skateboarding participation is understood to have influenced the former skaters’ youth and subsequent transition to adulthood. The analytical significance of such comments is therefore that they demonstrate an appreciation of how youth subculture participation can be an actively influence on biographical trajectories (Bennett, 2012; Gregory, 2012).

This seems to contrast the ‘silver surfers’ of Wheaton’s (2017, p. 100) recent study who ‘challenge preconceptions about the ageing body’. Instead, comments here are those for whom adulthood appears to render actual subcultural participation a distant, yet still meaningful, memory. Whilst many comments involved vivid and emotional words, phrases and expressive use of punctuation, they all appear to indicate a lack of active involvement in skateboarding. Rather, the media itself affords a return to past times that allows reflection on both the skate subculture of the
collective past and the youth of the personal biographical past as part of ‘the active process of remembering as an experience in the present which is situated, performed and socially contextualized’ (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 39). Importantly, it is the specific figuration of ‘old’ VHS footage ‘revived’ and re-viewed on YouTube that allows for moments of personal reflection. The final section of analysis will further discuss the specific role of digitized media materials posted on YouTube and examines the numerous comments made on posts relating to the media itself and the unique case of 1990s VHS skate movie tapes digitized for re-circulation on YouTube.

‘I Still Have the VHS-Tape Somewhere at Home!’: YouTube Re-Viewing and Format Nostalgia

As noted above, many comments analysed include references that served to specifically locate individual viewers in relation to specific editions of 411 Video Magazine. Thus, several features of media viewing were recalled that are specific to the VHS format. First, numerous comments related to the purchase and ownership of VHS tapes, with comments identifying a particular video as the ‘very 1st skate video I ever had’ or that they ‘got it for xmas in 99, along w my first complete’ while other comments, such as ‘Holy crap I remember borrowing this video from a friend in middle school, its a classic’ invoked memories of informal exchange of tapes between friends. Second, multiple comments recall repeated communal viewing within peer groups. Thus, by recalling how ‘My friend had it on a VHS tape and we watched at his house’ and how they ‘Must’ve watched it over 200 times!’, commentators depicted particular viewing habits associated with a pre-digital age of media consumption. As such, we can identify a form of nostalgia relating to not only the content of the videos but to the viewing routines that saw some commentators watch specific tapes, for example, ‘4 times a day, back to the day’. Third, some comments also referred to watching the videos as motivational preparation for skating sessions, reflecting that ‘I used to just have to watch the first couple of minutes to go skate’, or recalling how ‘A couple of these videos is all you really needed to get pumped to skate’. The practice of watching the digitized VHS tapes therefore indicated not just nostalgia for their past youthful subcultural involvement but a nostalgia for the format itself. This is important because, as Borden (2001, p. 120) suggests, skate media have always been ‘extraordinarily influential in encouraging new skaters to skate’.

While some comments made references to still owning 411 Video Magazine VHS cassette tapes (e.g., ‘I have this video on the original VHS. I bought it when I was 15 in 1995’), far more common were comments recounting how tapes were lost, discarded or broken. Comments referred to how viewers had ‘lost this VHS long ago’, ‘sadly let someone borrow this years ago and never got it back’ or how they ‘so regret chucking these out when I thought VHS was dead’, while others spoke of having ‘watched this tape so much I think I broke it’ and ‘i wore this vhs OUT’. Useful here is van Dijck’s (2005) discussion of digitization and the re-mediatization of memory and the continued importance of ‘material sensations’ and ‘the specific rituals and circumstances under which objects came into being’ (van Dijck, 2005, p. 325). Such comments both acknowledge the fragility of a physical format and, by association, serve to heighten the value of the now digitized content.
Also important, given the inference that most viewers commenting were no longer active subculture participants, were the many expressions of thanks to the person hosting the upload of the video. Video postings drew comments such as ‘amazing job u guys did there by putting them all there’, ‘cheers man.....thanks for posting this’, and ‘I owe you massively for this! I never thought I’d be able to see this again after my video broke’. Across the posted videos, comments showing gratitude to the video uploader often used convivial terms of address such as ‘mate’, ‘dude’, ‘boss’, and ‘legend’ that reflect, as Smit et al. (2017) have suggested, that the activities involved in hosting YouTube content, such as editing videos, adding titles, and descriptions of content, can be understood as caring, if masculinized, practices. This widespread acknowledgment of the efforts of those curating digitized subcultural media is seen as an act of subcultural labour and solidarity (Burgess & Green, 2009). Here, the subcultural labour of the few committed to locating, digitizing and hosting vintage skate media content on their YouTube channels allows other viewers to engage in such nostalgic re-viewing as analysed here with relative ease, whilst expressions of gratitude acknowledge both the labour involved in digital preservation and the emotions of subcultural kinship—albeit in notably fraternal terms—that might otherwise be lacking from viewing online content.

Finally, a number of comments compared past processes of acquiring and viewing VHS tapes with the present profusion of digital content. In contrast to the immediacy of the digitized platform, some comments therefore related the difficulty of getting tapes compared to the ease with which present day skaters can access a plethora of high-quality skateboard multimedia, typically through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Snyder, 2012). The format nostalgia exhibited therefore shares similarities with the ‘cassette culture’ identified by Kaun and Stiernstedt (2014) and also relates to Bennett’s (2012) suggestion that pre-digital era formats may be valorized by fan communities as being a more authentic viewing experience where the scarcity of analogue media content acts to enhance perceived value. Such offers a striking example of what Niemeyer (2014, p. 28) refers to as ‘analogue nostalgia’ involving ‘the longing for what is assumed to be lost in the continuing process of digitization that accounts for contemporary media culture’s widespread romanticizing and fetishizing of analogue media’.

**Discussion**

The article has outlined how one outcome of old skate media being digitized and re-circulated on the Internet is that non-practicing former participants can find spaces online in which to experience nostalgic reconnections to the skate subculture of their youth. The textual analysis of YouTube comments therefore demonstrates the viewers’ attempts to narrate a sense of ageing, often anchored by formative biographical moments. It has been suggested that within this there are three interrelated expressions of nostalgia evident in the comments analysed which relate, in turn, to the subculture itself, to the biographic youth of the individual commentator, and to the VHS format which, though now digitized, nevertheless prompts recollections of specific viewing practices relating to analogue skate media.
This article has concerned itself with the memories and recollections of formers skateboarders who, long after ceasing to skate, still engage with skate media to invoke feelings of residual belonging and maintain legacies of connection with their youthful subcultural identity. Inflected with references to heroic activities and fraternal bonding, skateboarding is remembered as a homosocial space. The article therefore contributes to developing understandings of the experiences of ageing in youth-dominated subcultures and lifestyles. However, in contrast to continued participation as active skaters (O’Connor, 2018; Willing et al., 2019), here we see former skaters ‘just’ viewing with limited interest in the skate culture of the present. While viewers may no longer be active in the construction, negotiation and maintenance of the current skate scene (Bennett & Peterson, 2004), such recollections by ageing subcultural participants are not simply just ‘harking back’ (Bennett, 2013, p. 14). Rather, these are nostalgic memories that draw on past experiences and both personal and collective identities and involves ‘comparative assessments across time’ (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 115). The findings therefore add to the ongoing interest in skate subcultural media (Dupont, 2020). However, rather than show the importance of contemporary media to the continued vibrancy of the skate subculture of the present, in the above analysis skate media of the past are shown to still play a role in how many people relate to the aesthetics and meanings of skateboarding.

The findings also add to subcultural scholarship examining how the Internet has come to sustain communities of online fan cultures where ‘values are shared and socialization happens even if identities are not always what they seem’ (Gelder, 2007, p. 146). Importantly, rather than simple wistful nostalgia, these engagements with digital media allow for a negotiation of former and current self and a maintenance of shared belonging and collective memories (Jacobson, 2020). Thus, Smit et al. (2017, p. 3) argue that YouTube has had a demonstrable impact on practices of memory construction due to the ‘sociotechnical practices afforded by the platform’. Indeed, here we see how YouTube has become a site of participatory culture (Burgess & Green, 2009) by which past participants of a subcultural community engage in subcultural engagement and labour through posting, viewing, and commenting on selected videos. The open and informal nature of YouTube video sharing means that popular and subcultural content that in the past may well have been seen as unworthy of safekeeping via formal archival activities can be stored, shared, and reviewed by niche communities (Pietrobruno, 2013). Such examples show how numerous comments made strong statements indicating powerful memories and recollections of subcultural participation and this furthers Williams’ (2006, p. 195) observation that, even for non-participating subcultural actors, the Internet can be ‘a social space through which personal and social identities are constructed, given meaning, and shared through the ritual of computer-mediated interaction’.

**Limitations and future research**

The analysis presented has various limitations which must be acknowledged and, further, can be used to suggest various possible avenues for further research. Most notably, the findings outlined are based on textual analysis and inferred meanings, but do not allow for a direct examination of the lived realities of viewers and
commentators. Further research may produce detailed qualitative data to better understand the specific viewing practices of those engaging with vintage skate media, both as viewers and content curators, and how these relate to other forms of continued engagement with elements of skate subculture should they persist in, for example, choice of clothing or taste in music. The sample of videos from which text comments were drawn is constrained by the sole focus on 411 Video Magazine. This series is rightly regarded as both influential at the time of its production and, in various ways, emblematic of a given era in the evolution of skate culture. However, the focus here on a single American-produced series may preclude analysis of a wider range of participants, memories, and meanings. For example, the sample and the methods used make it difficult to identify and analyse the perceptions and meanings of former skaters outside of the North American context. Further, the valorization of a romanticized past may conflict with changing demographics of skating (Borden, 2001; Lombard, 2016) and the growing importance of progressive and future-orientated practices and aesthetics of skateboarding (Geckle & Shaw, 2020). Further research is needed to examine how mediated memories are engaged with and interpreted by different groups and generational cohorts of current and former skaters. Notably, there is a risk that the present study, in focusing on an evidently male-dominated cultural space, prioritizes certain forms of knowledge production over others (Kempson, 2016). In addition, while practical, the use of YouTube to explore the mediation of subcultural memories does not capture the varied uses of digital content both within and across a proliferation of media platforms. As such, future research would need to study vintage subcultural content not just posted on YouTube but shared as links on other social media sites, embedded into blog posts or shared within closed groups platforms such as WhatsApp. These ‘uses’ of old content might engage with younger viewers watching in non-nostalgic, perhaps ironic, ways. Thus, it is important not to perpetuate too stark a distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media. Indeed, as Natale (2016) has argued, all media is in a state of change and users create novel engagements and expressions as they mix media formats and adopt novel viewing practices. Lastly, given the apparent trend for the commercialization of nostalgic content on social media (Niemeyer & Keightley, 2020), further research might examine the use of heritage media by skateboarding companies wishing to preserve subcultural capital and project an authenticity based on the longevity of their involvement in the skate economy and culture.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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