

**Eurocampus 3.5**

**Understanding people's views and visions.**

A semiotic and cultural approach of amateur audiovisual productions.

**STRANGERS**  
**Short Film Analysis**

Work Folder  
On video excerpts

"Strangers"

Created by 3sixty5days

Web link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfmS5gNLxTM&feature=fvsr>

"Re: Strangers"

Created by Niamh Donnelly

Web link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11DWx3hGu94&feature=response\\_watch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11DWx3hGu94&feature=response_watch)

"Hello?"

Created by thatwilsonguy

Web link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MbyUIBy5IM&feature=response\\_watch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MbyUIBy5IM&feature=response_watch)

"i eat my life"

Created by: sagwakitty15

Web link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-cD2AZ\\_fgk&feature=response\\_watch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-cD2AZ_fgk&feature=response_watch)

"Video response: Strangers"

Created by Glasscrush

Web link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juNfzY-Wt88&feature=response\\_watch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juNfzY-Wt88&feature=response_watch)

"Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me"

Created by cozmo1223

Web link: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8avs0CfZaM&feature=response\\_watch](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8avs0CfZaM&feature=response_watch)

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## 1/ Introduction

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In his introduction to “Understanding Media” McLuhan writes, *“Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned<sup>1</sup>”* Almost 50 years later, as technological developments have pulled control of the media away from the few and handed the power of production and circulation to the many, we witness a communicational environment where connections are no longer a choice, but a necessity. Since its inception in 2005, YouTube has become a symbol of the very concept of user generated content. According to data published by market research company comScore, six billion videos were viewed on YouTube in January 2009 alone<sup>2</sup>. In May of this year, Ryan Junee, Product Manager at YouTube wrote on the official YouTube blog, *“Now, 20 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute<sup>3</sup>”*

However, within this environment of access to near-infinite audiences on a global-stage, the following collection of videos illustrates another fascinating trend towards more specific and intimate communication.

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<sup>1</sup> McLuhan (1964)

<sup>2</sup> “YouTube Surpasses 100 Million U.S. Viewers for the First Time” Article accessed 1 November 2009 from:

[http://www.comscore.com/Press\\_Events/Press\\_Releases/2009/3/YouTube\\_Surpasses\\_100\\_Million\\_US\\_Viewers](http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/3/YouTube_Surpasses_100_Million_US_Viewers)

<sup>3</sup> Junee, R. (2009) Accessed on November 1, 2009 from [http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2009/05/zoinks-20-hours-of-video-uploaded-every\\_20.html](http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2009/05/zoinks-20-hours-of-video-uploaded-every_20.html)

The videos discussed within this paper do not merely represent the one-to-“anonymous-many” form of communication that we have come to associate with most YouTube style posts, they do not exist in isolation to each other but are attempts at a new form of direct, responsive and intimate communication. The first video, “Strangers,” posted by Stephen Byrnes, is a verbalised request to re-personalise his sphere of YouTube interaction. In a poetic move to invert the old cultural adage, “Never talk to strangers,” Stephen Byrnes reaches out to do exactly the opposite. He states what he wants to be able to know *who* is receiving/watching his video posts, *who* his you tube audience is, and therefore sets the filmic discourse of his responses by asking four questions:

*What’s your name?*

*Where do you come from?*

*How old are you?*

*What’s the most unique thing about you?*

The five other videos all serve as examples of responses to his request and their expression of this discourse varies. These responses, however, are only a snapshot of the dialogue in its entirety, as since Stephen Byrnes posted his video on October 6<sup>th</sup> 2009, he has, thus far, received 108 video responses and 2,504 written responses on the wall<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> True as of 21 November 2009.

The six videos analysed were all taken from YouTube and are as follows:

| Title                                     | Creator name   | Real name if known | Length |
|---|----------------|--------------------|--------|
| Strangers                                 | 3sixty5days    | Stephen Byrne      | 1.29   |
| Re : Strangers                            | NiamhDonnellyy | Niamh Donnelly     | 1.06   |
| Hello?                                    | thatwilsonguy  | Wilson             | 1.00   |
| I eat my life                             | Sagwakitty15   | Olivia             | 0.49   |
| Video Response : Strangers                | glasscrush     | Hiroko             | 1.15   |
| Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me | Cozmo1223      | Tom Cram           | 1.01   |

The six videos all share some common elements. Firstly, the pro-filmic situation is in prepared form, with each “actor” directing themselves in order to be recorded. In other words, these videos do not represent examples of scenes which have been shot to capture the mood, moment or environment with actors unawares, but have instead been purposefully, noticeably and consciously constructed to focus on the communicative message the authors want to project. Therefore, when discussing the genre of these films we can highlight that they are amateur videos created for the purpose of informal correspondence, self-introduction and belonging to a community.

The pro-filmic situation creates the field for the filmic text - in these situations, teenaged bedrooms. Nonetheless, this filmic result must not be interpreted as a representation of the world “as it is” but is simply a version or construction of reality, as numerous in possible interpretations as there are viewers.

Another feature common to all of the videos is we can assume that the person behind the camera (figuratively) is the same as the person in front. Due to the static nature

of the shots it can also be deduced that the camera (or mobile phone) was not handheld but left standing at a stabilized angle convenient to capture the footage.

All of these short films are staged, episodic in nature and some are also edited. It is important to note that by analyzing the selection of shots we can determine that priority and focus is giving to the eidetic aspect of the person being framed.

It is also imperative to highlight that this kind of communication may be symptomatic of a media – literate generation, what Castells et al (2006) may have referred to as a mobile youth culture<sup>5</sup>. What we witness within these short films is the creation of a mobile network within a pre-existent virtual community.

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### 3/ Visual and audio shots and themes

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#### 3.1/ Visual and audial shots

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Upon analyzing the shot sequences in the six videos, the following points were noted:

***Video 1: Strangers***

- Visual shots: 13 (12 boy talking/singing, 1 text)
- Sound shots: 9 (7 speech/singing, 1 slow motion speech, 1 music/noise)

***Video 2: RE: Strangers***

- Visual shots: 1 (9 speech bubbles)
- Sound shots: 1 (sound of breathing and turning pages only)

***Video 3: Hello?***

- Visual shots: 12 (but one shot is repeated 2 times (plays 3 times in total) + one speech bubble and one subtitle)

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<sup>5</sup> Castells et al (2006)

- Sound shots: 7
  - Introduction speech (normal talking)
  - Film company + scream
  - Normal talking
  - Music
  - Sound of hands moving together
  - Slowed down speech, “I don’t even know what to say”
  - Cymbal + credits

***Video 4: I eat my life***

- Visual shots: 1 + speech bubble
- Sound shots: 1 (sound of breathing and paper being stuffed in mouth)

***Video 5: Video Response: Strangers***

- Visual shots: 29
- Sound shots: approximately 20 including singing, talking, changed voice, screaming, imitating a sheep, sound of video ‘ Strangers’ in the background

***Video 6: Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me***

- Visual shots: 23
- Sound shots: 16 including elements from main video (singing), talking, music, shooting sound

As far as the number of shots in the videos is concerned, there is a clear distinction between the videos that consist of only one shot and the videos containing multiple shots. The two videos consisting of one big visual shot, both also contain just one simultaneously taken sound shot. The fact that the other videos are all composed of more visual and audial shots may be connected with the montage skills of the authors. Visual shots can be characterized by several eidetic and plastic aspects. In most of the shots priority is given to the representation of the author’s identity. This makes the people the most important eidetic aspect. The plastic aspects in these videos are somewhat hard to define. Text bubbles, subtitles and other special effects have been added to the videos afterwards. An interesting point to highlight at this

stage is that the first few seconds alone of video 5 are in black and white. This is symptomatic of video 5's producer's style as she integrates many filmic techniques throughout. The objects and situations in the visual shots will be classified under two headings – iconic themes and figurative meanings - in paragraph 5.1.

In the videos containing more than one sound shot, many special effects have been used. Music and other electronic sound elements have been inserted and in some shots the speech is artificially slowed down or transformed. In the last two videos sound shots of the main video (video 1) are used, either by editing the video or by just playing video 1 in the background. In video 5, video can heard playing in the background and is also present in the reflection in the actor's heart shaped sunglasses. Video 5 also refers to the master video by imitating the exact way in which Stephen Byrnes said the word, "Strangers" (close up, whispered, somewhat distorted) and making reference to his story about being bitten in the face by a peacock by repeatedly pretending a peacock is in her room. In video 6, the actor uses sections of video 1 within his in order to simulate an interview context which escalates emotionally for comical effect (concluding with the figurative shooting of the actor from video 1). The creator of video 6 also uses other Stephen Byrne productions within his in order to enrich his content.

### 3.2/ Scenes

Within the six videos, the uniting factor was scenes of interaction. Video 1 invited interaction and videos 2 - 5 responded with interaction. Another common characteristic was scenes of representation of/ introduction of self and social face (as this was what video 1 initiated and subsequently invited from others.) Furthermore, common scenes included scenes of demonstrating filming prowess and skills (as

shown by the inclusion of various filming techniques in videos 1, 3, 5 and 6) and scenes of demonstrating fun, personal creativity and expression (shared by all.)

A final yet very important point to note is that all videos shared a figurative meaning. If you had watched the film in isolation, you would not comprehend the interactive nature between the videos. For example, the actor in video 1 wears pink, heart-shaped sunglasses and makes the shape of a heart with his hands. The actor in video 2 makes a heart shape with her hands, the actor in video 5 wears pink, heart-shaped sunglasses and the actor in video 6 actually integrates video 1 into his video.

***Video 1: Strangers***

7 scenes:

- Singing to second camera
- Talking directly to public
- Explanation purpose of the video
- Questions to public in sound-effect / boy dancing
- Text with filmer's name
- Info about own personality
- Making heart with hands

***Video 2: RE: Strangers***

10 scenes (9 page turns + 1 heart):

- Hello I'm Niamh Donnelly. I'm 14 years of age.
- I live in Epsom, Surrey, England, United Kingdom, Europe, Planet Earth
- Hmm... Whats unique about me?
- I will laugh at anything and everything and that I'm accident prone
- Sorry for no Sound...
- BUT people are Sleeping
- Zzzz
- Since its 12am (ish)
- Okies byee
- Heart

***Video 3: Hello?***

7 scenes:

- Talking
- Film logo
- Name, age and Portugal written on computer
- Guns
- Hand dancing
- Slowed down speech
- Credits

***Video 4: I eat my life***

6 scenes:

- My name IS Olivia
- I am 13 years Old
- Gag
- I live in Washington D.C., USA
- I can fit Almost anything in my mouth (in a non-sexual way)
- Thumbs up

***Video 5: Video Response: Strangers***

11 scenes:

- Singing (black & white, title) (referring to main video)
- Talking about own personality (answering questions in main video)
- Changed voice, only mouth is shown (referring to main video)
- Thinking (only sound is changing, sound of main video in the background, video is static)
- Acting as if scared by a peacock (2x) (referring to main video)
- Imitating a sheep
- Showing birthmark

***Video 6: Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me***

4 scenes:

- Parts of main video
- Parts of other video made by the author of the main video
- Author answering questions/shooting
- Text fragment with music

## 4/ Editing visual shots

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### 4.1/ Montage

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#### **Type of montage**

The montage defines the narrative structure of the video and in all six videos the narrative is based on causality and chronology. In two of the videos the montage consists of only one long shot, the other four have a more complex type of montage. Loose elements have been put together in a chronological order. In the last video a few shots from the main video (video 1) have been integrated. The author makes it look like he's being interviewed by the author of video 1 by directly responding to his questions. Some of the montages are broken up with the existence of computer generated information shots.

### 4.2/ Mise en image

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#### **Mise en image**

The mise en image expresses the view of the author on the pro-filmic reality, his interpretation. Within the films, the near static nature of the camera and limited use of zoom contributes to an uninterrupted focus on the subject, the main actor. Additionally, the low angle assumed in many of the shots helps to frame the actor and create an intimate space. It may also be noteworthy that the author of the first video utilizes a technique of moving in and out of the visual field. Zoom and tracking are sparingly used and the actor is usually positioned squarely in the middle of the frame. The few close-ups that occur often centre on the mouth, significant because this was a feature the actor employed in the original video.

***Video 1: Strangers Video 1: Strangers***

- Camera movements: static
- Camera positions: neutral
- Close-up
- No zoom or tracking
- Filmer walks in and out the visual field

***Video 2: RE: Strangers***

- Camera movements: Completely static
- Camera positions: Low angle, frames girl as main / only actor – intimate

***Video 3: Hello?***

- Camera movements: Static (2 different types of static, slightly different camera set up due to being filmed at different times)
- Camera positions: Low angle, framing boy as only actor, intimate

***Video 4: I eat my life***

- Camera movements: Static
- Camera positions: low angle, framing girl as only actor, intimate.

***Video 5: Video Response: Strangers***

- Camera movements: static
- Camera positions: neutral
- Close-up
- No zoom or tracking
- Part in black & white
- Title

***Video 6: Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me***

- Camera movements: static
- Camera positions: neutral, doesn't change

## 5/ Interpretation

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### 5.1/ Most important iconic themes / figurative meanings

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In several of the videos, we can find figurative themes that can be interpreted depending on the knowledge of the viewer. For example, in video 2 we can see the actor creates a heart shape with her hands – if you had not seen the first video, you would not be aware that this was a response, in the form of mimicry, to the first. In video 5, the actor wears heart glasses which would be less relevant to the context had you not seen the actor in video one also wearing heart glasses. In video 6, video 1 is actually incorporated in the content, thus creating a direct link between the two.

Furthermore, we have identified something we refer to, below, as a teenaged network. We state this on the basis of certain constants present within the video. For example, most of the respondents seem to fall within a particular age bracket, they harbour similar communication styles and have an inherent understanding of a symbolic code composed of various iconic themes such as t-shirts reading “stand for something,” green bracelets, linguistic forms such as “okies byee,” hair styles and bedrooms. Due to our own personal experiences and exposure to teenage culture within the ‘Western’ world, we are able to extract and visualize a network between these individuals.

Below you can see a tabular representation of the iconic and figurative themes identified within the videos.

**Video 1: Strangers Video 1: Strangers**

**Iconic themes:**

- Second camera
- Direct interaction with public
- Hairdo
- Heart shaped sunglasses
- Singing
- Heart

**Figurative meanings:**

- Showing that the filmer's a YouTube professional (making second video IN the video, referring to other links, 'Sorry it's a bit short this week.', 'See you next Tuesday.'
- Acts as if spectators watch him secretly
- Teenage life
- Teenage networks

**Video 2: RE: Strangers**

**Iconic themes:**

- Bedroom
- Flipbook
- Handwritten messages
- Hair
- Speech bubbles
- Heart sign and smile

**Figurative meanings:**

- Secret? (Silent communication)
- Teenage life
- Teenage networks
- Happy, carefree

**Video 3: Hello?**

**Iconic themes:**

- Bedroom
- "Stand for something" t-shirt
- Green bracelet
- Film branding and subtitles

**Figurative meanings :**

- Happy
- Confident
- Teenage communication

**Video 4: I eat my life**

**Iconic themes:**

- Bedroom
- Photos on the wall
- Pieces of paper

**Figurative meanings:**

- Childish
- Happy
- Different

**Video 5: Video Response: Strangers**

**Iconic themes:**

- Heart shaped sunglasses
- Singing
- Birthmark
- Peacock
- Changed voice

**Figurative meanings:**

- Happy
- Funny

**Video 6: Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me**

**Iconic themes:**

- Hat
- Gun
- Direct answers to questions in main video (as if in real interaction)

**Figurative meanings:**

- Happy
- Funny
- Being interviewed

## 5.2/ Representations and Justifications

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The fact that these videos were published on YouTube suggests that they were not created for purposes of memory or personal consumption but for connection and communication. The very focus and purpose of these videos has to do with self-representation, in what way did these actors represent themselves? We would argue that they represent themselves as happy, confident, you-tube/camera-literate and as part of a community. We can justify this by pointing to our interpretation of things like smiles, heart shaped signals, the use of playful communication techniques such as drawings and flipcharts. The tone of this snapshot of the dialogue seems quite carefree with actors expressing difference, “unique-ness” in a communal environment.

Below we have noted our interpretations of the way in which we feel the authors wished to represent themselves. Justifications for these representations can be found accordingly.

### *Video 1: Strangers Video 1: Strangers*

#### Representation:

- Author is emo
- Author is Youtube professional
- Happy
- Community

#### Justification:

Hairdo, other video's posted on YouTube.  
Referring to other video's, 'It's a bit short this week.', 'See you next Tuesday.'  
dancing, making heart with hands, smile  
direct communication with spectators

### *Video 2: RE: Strangers*

#### Representation:

- Happy
- Carefree
- Community

#### Justification:

Smile  
Smile, heart sign, nature of communication  
Setting, silent, bedroom, flipchart

***Video 3: Hello?***

Representation:

- Confident
- Happy
- Carefree
- Good with youtube

Justification:

Speaking directly into camera, lots of hand movements  
Smiling, topic of conversation  
Smiling, topic of conversation

***Video 4: I eat my life***

Representation:

- Playful?
- Not serious
- Child /woman

Justification:

Nature of video  
Thumbs up  
Reference to sexuality.

***Video 5: Video Response: Strangers***

Representation:

- Happy
- Unique
- Community
- Good with putting videos voice changing, different elements put together

Justification:

singing, smiling  
birthmark  
direct response to main video

***Video 6: Stephen Byrne (3sixty5days) Interviews Me***

Representation:

- Community
- Good with putting video's different elements put together, sound effects, elements from main video included
- ' Fake' violence

Justification:

direct response to main video  
virtually shooting author of main video

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5.3/ Conclusion / Purpose

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In sum, we can conclude that the purpose of these videos had much to do with connection and dialogue as well as self-disclosure. The beauty of the medium is in its inherent ability to create communities, or cultural spheres across geographical boundaries. Stephen Byrne seems quite well known within his 'culture' and his original video attracted responses from around the globe, even those in languages other than English. Within the five responses that we chose we see representation from the UK, Ireland, Australia, Portugal and the United States.

This snapshot of a video dialogue illustrates the pinnacle of community creation. This community is unique in that it can never be closed, it is defined by invitation to others to join and even we, as observers could become a part of it should we want. A salient aspect of community members is their integrative nature. This can be seen best by the reference to each other (strangers) within their videos of self-disclosure. This creates two dichotomies. One, of personal introduction in combination with other acceptance and the other of competition (they are seeking a prize offered by Stephen Byrne awarded for their creative skills for the best video montage) and collaboration (they use each others' videos in competing.)

Finally, it is imperative to note that our interpretation based on what we single out as important, relevant, and interesting within the films is biased by and based on our own cultural values.

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## 6/ Bibliography

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