

From Letters to Vlog Entries

The Vlog Adaptation as a Remediation of the Epistolary Novel

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Introduction

People love to read, watch, and experience stories, even – or especially – when those stories originate from another time period. The nineteenth century novels by Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters seem to be more popular than ever, being continually reprinted and adapted to different media. These adaptations vary greatly in objective, concept, and execution. Some adaptations, called costume dramas, aim for fidelity to the original, such as TV series *Pride and Prejudice* (Langton, 1995) and film *Wuthering Heights* (Arnold, 2011). These adaptations transpose the original storyline as well as the original setting to the film. Other adaptations of classics transport the storylines to the twentieth/twenty-first century, such as ‘chick flick’ *Clueless* (Herckerling, 1995) and Bollywood film *Bride & Prejudice* (Chadha, 2004). And there is a broad genre which does not necessarily adapt the whole story, but alludes to it, making playful use of (primarily Austen’s) novels, such as ‘chick lit’ *Breakfast at Darcy’s* (McNamara, 2011) and book series *Bridget Jones* (Fielding, 1996, 1999, 2013).

Together these adaptations show both the love a modern day audience has for these nineteenth century stories and the urge and practice to adapt and appropriate these stories. There is always a wide range of adaptations styles at any moment and throughout history the manners and media in which people have adapted stories is ever-changing. As with any other storytelling genre, adaptations are always enabled by technology and the creators of adaptations draw on the means of technology available to them. So it is appropriate that with the rise of the digital age users have used the specific tools of the internet to create a new mode of adaptation. Since 2012, with its first production *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012), a new genre of adaptations emerged, which I call the vlog adaptation. Broadly speaking this is the genre in which books are adapted into the format of video weblogs (also known as vlogs), usually uploaded on social media broadcasting website *YouTube*. The vlog adaptation is an emerging genre, currently consisting of seven vlog series. In the appendix you will find an overview of these adaptations, including their creators, the works they adapt, and their current stage in the process. It is noteworthy that, although not a defining characteristic, all vlog adaptations until now have been made of nineteenth century novels.

As with any other medium the vlog has medium-specific properties which influence the way in which stories are (re)told (Hayles, 2004). Indeed the genre of the vlog adaptation adds its own possibilities and difficulties. A series of four minute videos allows for a different structure of storytelling than a paper book divided in chapters. In vlog adaptations the storyline is transported to a sequence of short videos, generally from one camera angle, in which the narrator tells a first-person narrative and, after optional editing, publishes it on the internet. Generally actual vlogs are autobiographical narratives, but in vlog adaptations it is a fictional character played by an actor who pretends to tell an autobiographical narrative. Viewers know the narrative is fictional, but also engage in the story as if they were watching a non-fictional narrative. The emerging genre of the vlog

adaptation is compelling for its use of narrative strategies from a non-fictional genre to a fictional genre and thus using the conventions to adapt a novel.

The vlog adaptation is part of the use of the so-called ‘new media’, which are characterized as digital, interactive and hypertextual. The ideological properties attributed to new media in general frame the genre of the vlog adaptation as well. Even though the ‘new media’ are plural, and the individual media emerged at different times, in popular discourse the use of new media is often presented as one definite break with the ‘old’ media before them (10, Lister et al.). The new media were considered as a new mode of communication, which was not only new but also a definite improvement over the ‘old media’. As Lister et al. state: “There is a strong sense in which the ‘new’ in new media carries the ideological force of ‘new equals better’” (28, Lister et al.). Yet the truth value of this ideological connotation is contested by, among other scholars, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in their text “Remediation” (1996). Bolter and Grusin argue that every medium always remediates other media, criticizing the idea of media that are altogether different from their predecessors. They also point out that media develop and ‘old media’ can remediate ‘newer media’ and consequently a discourse of linear progress in the development of new media is unfounded.

The vlog adaptation largely deals with the framing of newness and improvement that surrounds new media. It is therefore not surprising that previous analyses of vlog adaptations, such as Sumner (2014), have primarily reinforced these ideological connotations by stressing the vlog adaptation “could drastically [change] how we think about storytelling in the future” (Sumner, 2014). However, my examination of the narrative of the vlog adaptation can force us to reconsider these statements of discontinuity when it comes to the development of new media. Although the vlog adaptation may seem like an entirely different way to tell a (fictional) story, I argue that it is not new to convey a fictional narrative as an ‘autobiography’ divided over small separate media texts addressing an explicit narratee. In fact, it was in fashion nearly three hundred years ago in the mid-1700’s: the epistolary novel. The epistolary novel tells a fictional story narrated as a series of letters, published in book form. A connection between the vlog adaptation and the epistolary novel does not fit in the linear succession in which media are generally described. Yet I will show how the vlog adaptation as a new medium repurposes narrative strategies from the older genre of the epistolary novel. Thus I will argue against the popular discourse of definite newness and definite improvement found in popular discourse on new media in general and vlog adaptations in particular. My research statement is: The narrative structure of the genre of the vlog adaptation can be understood by creating a media-history that displays its non-linear connections to the genre of the epistolary novel.

I propose to use Bolter and Grusin’s “Remediation” (1996) as a useful analytical and theoretical tool to display this connection between the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation. I will

support this argument by considering the three major concepts Bolter and Grusin define in their article “Remediation” (1996): *immediacy*, *hypermediacy*, and *remediation*.

In *chapter one* I will explore how the concept of immediacy is employed in both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation. Immediacy is the desire for or pretense of transparent, unmediated communication, which is nevertheless always created by use of media. Making use of non-fictional genres is a tool of the epistolary novel and vlog adaptation to create an experience of immediacy. I will take a cultural approach to explaining the rise of the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation. I will regard the epistolary novel as an effect of the postal culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in which “the Post Office created a public space for private conversations of people ranging from paupers to professionals” (71, Whyman, 2009). I will show how this parallels to the rise of the vlog adaptations, which I regard as an effect of the memoir and blogging boom, which entails “a practice of reading in public focused on the mass circulation of life narratives” (660, Gilmore, 2010).

In *chapter two* I will examine how both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation are examples of hypermediacy. Hypermediacy is the use of multiple media within one work which foregrounds the materiality of the medium because of the tension between the different media which are used. I will argue that hypermediacy can be used to reach homogeneity or heterogeneity and that this affects the narrative. Homogeneity is reached when the integration of several media creates a unity and uniformity which the individual medium did not ensure. The epistolary novel’s multimedial aspect consists of the merging of letter writing with the novel, thus creating a unity and uniformity in the narrative which was not present in letter writing alone. Heterogeneity on the other hand is reached when the integration of several media creates a disunity and nonuniformity within the narrative. The vlog adaptation creates a fragmented narrative by splitting up parts of the storyline which were formally united in the novel. One of the effects of hypermediacy is the foregrounding of the fictionality of the narrative. I will discuss how the hypermediacy in this way leads the reader to question the reliability of the narrator both in the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation.

In *chapter three* I will explore how the concept of remediation defines the genre of the vlog adaptation. Remediation is the process in which media continually make use of other media. The vlog adaptation repurposes elements from different media, which does not entail just copying properties. The re-use of a property in a different medium creates a redefinition of the property in its new use. The vlog adaptation repurposes the property of serialization, a property used in other media such as the epistolary novel and the TV series. Serialisation means the story line is told in a sequence of narratives. It shares this property with, among other media, the epistolary novel. Yet in the redefinition of serialisation in the vlog adaptation it attains a partly different temporal experience than the

epistolary novel. I will argue that the real-time element of the vlog adaptation is a defining characteristic of the genre based on the serialisation of the narrative.

Chapter one

Immediacy: from the postal culture to the memoir boom

Truthfulness as a literary trope in fiction

Immediacy is defined by the desire for or pretense of transparent, unmediated communication: “a transparent interface is one that erases itself, so that the user would no longer be aware of confronting a medium, but instead would stand in an immediate relationship to the contents of the medium” (318, Bolter and Grusin). The concept of immediacy contains a paradox: “Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying technologies of mediation” (313, Bolter and Grusin). In other words: the experience of immediacy is achieved by using technological means. Immediacy can be experienced with all sorts of fictional stories, fantastic and implausible as they may be. Bolter and Grusin use devices for Virtual Reality as an example for this (1, Bolter and Grusin). Yet in practice, I argue that achieving an immediate relationship to the content of the medium is an ideological objective that lends itself well to non-fiction genres of a personal communicative nature. Even though non-fiction works are mediated as well as fiction, readers and viewers experience it as the truth, forgetting mediation took place. The fact that it is a representation, which I will refer to as a ‘textual construct’, is seemingly erased by the promise of truthfulness and authenticity. In this chapter I will show how the fiction genres of the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation make use of the conventions of non-fiction genres to convey an experience of immediacy, attempting to escape from the appearance of mediation.

The ‘postal culture’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth century developed from logistical means, such as the presence of the post office and infrastructure, to send letters to other people. As Susan Whyman (2009) states: “During the eighteenth century, the pen, the post and the people became permanently connected to each other” (3). It was key that this was a service not only for an exclusive number of people in society, but for the masses as well. As Laura Rotunno states in her book *Postal Plots* (2013):

The rise of postal reform between 1840 and 1898 [...] inspired the lower and middle classes to read and write more frequently, that allowed this population a measure of social and political agency, and, that, in turn, led many of these people into the literary world as writers and readers. (Rotunno, 2013)

In this statement it is already visible that letters were used for achieving social and political agency. This is heightened and elaborated by postal agent James Holbrook in 1855:

Imagine a town without a post office! a community without letters! ‘friends, Romans, countrymen, and lovers’, particularly the lovers, cut off from correspondence, bereft of newspapers, buried alive from the light of intelligence, and the busy stir of the great world! What an appalling picture! (cited in Henkin, 2006, inconsistent use of capitals in original)

This historical source aptly shows both the reliance on technological means and the sense of immediacy. Holbrook's emphasis on lovers also shows the personal accent of the use of letters. The postal culture tries to 'communicate' a direct view into the world of the letter writer by means of writing, sending, and reading letters. This attempt shows that letters were mainly a non-fiction genre that generally tried to achieve truthfulness. I say 'achieve truthfulness' because, as any textual construct, the medium and the narrative frame the 'truth' which is conveyed. The experience is of immediacy, of unmediated truth, but essentially the medium acts as a filter for the conveyance of the content. Even though letters are textual constructs, without them people feel cut off from each other, from intelligence, from the rest of the world.

The same is applicable for the vlog. The vlog is a relatively new medium of communication. Marginal use was made of them from the year 2000, usually as an addition to a weblog. The phenomenon really started after the online video sharing service YouTube was launched in 2005. This shows that the use of the vlog is reliant on technological means. The vlog is related to the weblog, which are "frequently modified web pages containing dated entries listed in reverse chronological sequence" (cited in Frobenius, 816). Granted that weblogs can be about every subject there is, many blogs can be characterized as "single-authored, personal diaries" (cited in Frobenius, 816)¹. This means weblogs are usually of an autobiographical nature, as is the vlog. Maximiliane Frobenius (2011), proposes the definition of the vlog:

A video sequence similar to a blog that a user (vlogger) shoots of him- or herself talking into a camera and, after optional editing, uploads to the internet, where viewers can rate it and/or leave comments in written or video form. (814)

This definition aptly points out that a vlog must be seen as a video sequence, not a single video², and the definition is precise but also broad enough to contain the wide range of vlogs there is. The level of proficiency changes from one vlogger to the next. Most popular vlogs are edited quite extensively, but a majority of vlogs consists of people talking into the camera without much editing or signs of preparation.

The emergence of the vlog as a popular genre to publish a personal story can be explained within a wider "memoir boom". This "memoir boom" refers to the increase in publications of memoirs which "has now vibrated in our collective consciousness for well over a decade" (Fass, 2006, 108).

¹ For a detailed comparison of the diary and the blog, I refer to José van Dijck's "Writing the Self: Of Diaries and Weblogs" (in Neef, 2006). In this article Van Dijck compares these genres from three perspectives: materiality and technology, cultural form, and cultural practice. In my thesis the emphasis is on the comparison between the epistolary novel and the vlog since they share a communicative objective. I will only make marginal use of the comparison between diary and blog/vlog.

² When mentioning about one specific video in a vlog, I will use the term vlog entry.

Like the postal culture the memoir boom too relies on technological means. Without the availability of cheap printing there would not be the possibility to publish everyone's life story, cheap print has led to the "the current democratizing of the genre" (Fass, 2006, 108). But the aim of the memoir boom is to make one's life visible. Even though they are textual constructs ideally the memoir acts as a window into someone's life: "During the long memoir boom, an unprecedented number of people have experienced varieties of fame by publishing accounts of what would have previously been considered their private lives" (Gilmore, 2010). The changing norms during the memoir boom Gilmore describes are amplified when the online blog, from the late 1990's, and the online vlog, from the mid 2000's, emerged. The costs of starting a blog or vlog are virtually non-existent³ and "the blog boom is the most democratized revolution in media ever" (Thompson, 2006). Both the memoir in general and the blog and vlog in particular can be understood as the desire for direct communication, a medium so democratized it practically does not exist anymore.

The postal culture and the memoir/blogging boom are both media that try to fulfill the desire for immediacy. The postal culture and the memoir/blogging boom are therefore paralleled in their devices for creating immediacy, as Bolter and Grusin point to the different ways immediacy is (supposedly) "achieved" in different time periods:

If the Enlightenment subject was content to stand and gaze through the window frame, the romantic subject wanted to get closer. And if in turn the romantic was convinced that it was the self's responsibility and was within the self's power to undertake an active search for reality, modernism went further in espousing the "endless presence of the self" to itself." (354)

Likewise, one could view the memoir boom as postal culture on a broader scale. The postal culture is characterized by people sending personal narratives to individuals they were acquainted with and the memoir boom is characterized by people publishing personal narratives for everyone who cares to read them.

Above I contextualised two genres of non-fiction writing within a bigger cultural trend. Neither the epistolary novel nor the vlog adaptations are non-fiction genres, but they emerged within these cultural trends of non-fiction genres and make explicit use of the conventions of these genres by doubling their narrative structure. A principal value of letter writing and the personal vlog is that the narrative told is autobiographical and truthful. They have to show a direct experience of the real world. By copying the narrative structure of these genres the value of truthfulness is also projected onto the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation and consequently these narratives generate supposedly 'direct experiences' into the fictional world.

³ Starting a blog is "ridiculously cheap" (Thompson, 2006), but making a professional blog or vlog will of course cost more money and time.

By using the format of letter to frame the narrative the epistolary novel copies the conventions as well as the values of regular letters. The epistolary novel is a series of ‘letters’ each consisting of a fictional addressee (“Dear X”) who is the narratee, and fictional addresser (“Sincerely, Y”) who is the narrator. This reinforces the feeling that the letters are real even though the reader is not consistent with the addressee. Between the salutation and closure of the letters the addresser writes about recent events in his or her life that are follow ups of events described in earlier letters. These letters are written in an autobiographical style and from a first person perspective. The value of truthfulness that lies in the autobiographical nature of actual letter writing is transported to the epistolary novel. Even though the epistolary novel tells a fictional story, the reader feels like he or she is reading letters that have actually been sent by the addresser. The effect of using the letter format in the epistolary novel is therefore the use of truthfulness as a literary trope.

In the vlog adaptation a similar process occurs. Vlog adaptations adapt a novel into vlog format. The story is fictional, but the vlog format is used to make the story seem like a direct experience into someone’s life. This pretence of non-fiction is already alluded to in the titles of the vlogs. The first vlog adaptation was *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013) which adapts Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) into vlog format. The title refers to a diary, which is a non-fiction genre. Usually diaries are of a personal nature, but due to the contribution of the memoir boom, and more specifically the blogging boom, it is an acceptable possibility to publish a personal story such as a diary for everyone to read it. This means the sign of trust which accompanies the potential sharing of a diary (122, Van Dijck, in Neef, 2006) becomes absent. Everyone, including “complete strangers” (122, Van Dijck, in Neef, 2006), can read a blog or watch a vlog without the personal permission of the author. Yet despite their publication the accounts of the vlog are still of a personal nature: “privacy and publicness appear full of contradictions: comments are personal yet readable by everyone, intimate yet public” (129, Van Dijck, in Neef, 2006). Other vlog adaptations followed after *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and several also allude to non-fiction genres in their titles, such as *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* (2013-present) which adapts Emily Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Emma’s journal* (2013) which adapts Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815). Like the epistolary novel vlog adaptations also include an explicit narrator and narratee. The fictional narrative is told by the narrator from a first person perspective as if it were a non-fictional autobiographical narrative. Prime example is the, by now internet-famous⁴, utterance “My name is Lizzie Bennet and this is my life” (LBD Ep: 1 0:24-0:26).

The vlog adaptation is a remediation of the epistolary novel, for both genres are fictional, and explicitly so, but employ the characteristics of a non-fiction genre to achieve immediacy. Both the

⁴ Fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* made the utterance into an informal ‘motto’ of the web series. This utterance is often cited in social media posts about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Especially on social media website Tumblr the utterance is often used as a caption of shared pictures of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

postal culture and the memoir boom rely on truthfulness, the understanding that a story is true, which Philippe LeJeune calls ‘the autobiographical pact’ (LeJeune, 1989; represented in Popkin, 2001). Non-fiction stories are also mediated and not necessarily all true, and LeJeune acknowledges the pact is “necessarily something of a myth” (Popkin, 2001) but they are closest to achieving immediacy because it is perceived as an authentic story. Because of the autobiographical pact, readers and viewers perceive the narrative as unmediated and transparent. Every, or nearly every, reader of the epistolary novel and viewer of a vlog adaptation know they are reading or viewing a fictional story because the epistolary novel’s material is a book, not separate handwritten letters and the vlog adaptation adapts generally adapts very famous books and are recognisable as fiction. Strictly speaking, there is no presence of truthfulness or an autobiographical pact. Yet the employment of non-fiction characteristics described above into the narrative structure make the story feel more authentic, like a window into a real world instead of the story world. The very act of mediation therefore becomes invisible, creating an experience of immediacy.

Chapter two

Hypermediacy: between homogeneity and heterogeneity

Materiality as the unreliability of the narrator

In chapter one I discussed how both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation try to create an experience of immediacy by appropriating characteristics of a non-fiction genre. This is a paradox in itself, because it is the foregrounding of the medium which creates this “perceptual immediacy”, as Bolter and Grusin state:

Internet sites offer stories, images, and now video that is up-to-the-minute, all in the name of perceptual immediacy. Yet these media enact another logic with equal enthusiasm: web sites are often riots of diverse media forms. (313)

Even though the logic of immediacy, described in chapter one, highly diverges from the logic of hypermediacy, described in this chapter, immediacy and hypermediacy also rely on one another and are always united in multimedial artifacts. These “diverse media forms” foreground the use of media in addition to trying to erase the medium. This foregrounding of materiality by use of multimedia is called hypermediacy (327, Bolter and Grusin), which “privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and that emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished art object” (327, Mitchell, cited in Bolter and Grusin). Bolter and Grusin explain examples of hypermedia from several time periods but seem to favor digital media as their most extensive prototype of hypermediacy, focusing on digital media's use of multimedia that generates heterogeneity and fragmentation. Yet multimedia artifacts do not always have to lead to heterogeneity and fragmentation, they can also be used to reach a sense of unity or homogeneity in a work of art. In this chapter I will explain how both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation are examples of hypermediacy through different means. One of the effects of hypermediacy is the foregrounding of the fictionality of the narrative. I will discuss how the hypermediacy in this way leads the reader to question the reliability of the narrator both in the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation.

The epistolary novel is easily defined as a multimedia artifact because it combines the letter format in the narrative with the book form. This way it creates a tension between the conventions of the novel and the conventions of letter writing. Even though the letters are fictional, the epistolary novel uses the narrative structure of letter writing: “authors of epistolary fiction have relied on the overlapping of these two worlds—of real postal usage and of the fictional representation of it” (Fass, 181). And yet the epistolary novel is a narrative consisting of a certain unity, with a beginning, middle and end in book form. This contrasts vastly with the conventions of letter writing. Letter writing does not have this unity and is instead fragmented, heterogeneous, and emphasizes the process rather than the finished product. In an actual letter exchange the narrative does not necessarily tell one sequence of events, the receiver may not keep all the individual letters in one place (and if he or she does keep

them in one place this is an action, not a passive property) and all letters may look different. One can imagine there are series of letters of different types of paper and different color ink. This real letter writing seems to fit Mitchell's definition (as represented in Bolter and Grusin), which stresses fragmentation, heterogeneity and performance, much more accurately. But in the case of the epistolary novel it is the fictionality of the narrative and the fictionality of the letters that is foregrounded by creating a homogeneous work of art. For this reason the epistolary novel fits the description of hypermediacy, be it in an unconventional way.

The vlog adaptation on the other hand fits the characteristics of hypermediacy much more straightforwardly. This type of adaptation takes the (nineteenth century) novel, which is generally a homogeneous narrative and recreates the story in a much more heterogeneous and fragmented narrative. This fragmentation starts with the use of many small videos, which often have a "Do-It-Yourself"-look, and they are uploaded one after another, not all at once⁵. But the fragmentation is often taken to a higher level by not only giving the protagonist of the novel a voice, but also creating separate YouTube-channels for minor characters, whose narratives also tell part of the story from another perspective⁶. To understand the full narrative a viewer has to watch the multitude of videos. This adapts the narrative structure from linear in the novel to a mosaic in the vlog adaptation. The vlog adaptation therefore repurposes the conventions⁷ of the vlog to create both an immediate and hypermediate experience. Yet there is one significant difference. Just like with the epistolary novel, the vlog adaptation has a beginning, a middle and an end whereas the non-fiction genres they appropriate, letter writing and the personal vlog, do not. This break in conventions adds to the hypermediacy of the genres because it stresses their fictionality.

Above I have demonstrated that both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation display hypermediacy. This hypermediacy is attained in opposite ways (by homogeneity and heterogeneity), but it affects the perception of the narratives in the same way. By the visibility of the mediation "the logic of immediacy" is contrasted by "the logic of hypermediacy", as Bolter and Grusin put it: "the logic of hypermediacy expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and regarding it as a "real" space that lies beyond mediation" (334). The fascination with the constructedness of the narrative automatically leads the reader or viewer to refrain from taking the narrative as an unmediated truth. In the case of the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation this means the reliability of the narrator is compromised on two levels: intradiegetic and extradiegetic.

⁵ A more detailed account of fragmented publication of the vlog adaptation is given in chapter three.

⁶ This use of multiple channels is particularly a characteristic of professional vlog adaptations, which are generally longer than amateur vlog adaptations and thus have more opportunity to create a more complex narrative.

⁷ In chapter one the conventions of the vlog are described.

An epistolary novel is narrated by an explicit addresser in a first-person perspective and addressed to an explicit narratee. This means that readers understand this is a narrator who can (fictionally) choose which things will be narrated and which will not. This has not always been an element of the epistolary novel. Until the eighteenth century the epistolary novel was used “as a strategy for delving into the characters' psychology or for creating a narrative of intimacy” (Romani, 179), thus creating a sense of immediacy. The emphasis on communication and what will be communicated is an element which appears in the epistolary novel roughly from the eighteenth century onwards (Romani, 179). This emphasis makes the reader perceive the unreliability of the narrator on an intradiegetic level because by regarding the epistolary novel as communicated letters one considers the text as non-fictional construct written by the narrator-character. The unreliability of the narrator is amplified by the use of hypermediacy. The epistolary novel combines the conventions of letter writing with the book form. Due to the book form the reader will have a strong sense of the constructedness of the narrative as well and be more aware of the possibility of an unreliable narrator and its possible effect on the outcome of the story. For example, the book form ensures the reader knows in advance how many pages the book has and how far one has progressed in reading it. When the narrator states halfway through the book that all problems are resolved, the reader will not believe this, simply because he or she still has half a story left to read. This makes the reader perceive the unreliability of the narrator on an extradiegetic level because by regarding the epistolary novel as a novel one considers the text as a fictional construct written by an author.

In vlog adaptations the narrator is usually the person who is the focalizer in the novel which is adapted. These novels are character-focalized but nevertheless have an omniscient narrator. This ensures a relatively objective account of events in the story world. In vlog adaptations however the mediation is visible through the shift to a first-person narration, the fragmented storytelling and visibility of editing in vlog entries. This leads the viewers to see the mediation and as a result understand the unreliability of the narration. This unreliability occurs on the same levels as the epistolary novel: intradiegetic and extradiegetic. Signs of unreliability due to inconsistencies in the narration are intradiegetic, which happens because several characters are presented in the different vlog entries and they show different perspectives on the story world. An example is the storyline in *Emma Approved* (2013-present) in which there is a misunderstanding as to which person Mr Elton is in love with. *Emma Approved* adapts Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815). Both the novel and its vlog adaptation character Emma tries to find a romantic partner for her friend Harriet. She wants to match Harriet to Mr Elton, a man of high stature, and she is completely unaware Mr Elton does not want Harriet, but instead has feelings for Emma herself. Both readers of the novel and viewers of the vlog adaptation figure this out quickly. In the novel this does not lead to the unreliability of the narrator because the story is not narrated by Emma, instead it just creates dramatic irony. In the vlog adaptation however viewers perceive the situation through Emma's narration. As a professional matchmaker Emma sings

her own praises about how well she can match people. When she talks about matching Harriet and Mr Elton she misinterprets the whole situation. In the few appearances Mr Elton makes in the vlog entries it is clear to the viewer he is in love with Emma. Emma however narrates this event:

“Significant progress has been made on the Senator Elton / Harriet front – seriously, could they have been any cuter?” (“The Proof is in the Yoghurt”, 0:01-0:05, EA). This, and other instances in which Emma misinterprets the situation with Mr Elton, not only points out she is an unreliable narrator in this situation but also makes her other statements about her abilities in matchmaking questionable. Although readers of *Emma* will catch on to this before people who have not read *Emma* the fact that Emma is unreliable as a narrator happens at an intradiegetic level since regarding vlog adaptation as actual vlog entries one considers the text as non-fictional construct made by the narrator-character.

The opposite happens on the extradiegetic level. On the extradiegetic level the unreliability of the narrator relies on the hypermediacy of the genre. That is, unreliability not just because they are vlogs but because they are adaptations of well-known books. Bolter and Grusin point out:

Austen films do not contain any overt reference to the novels on which they are based: they do not acknowledge that they are adaptations. Acknowledging the novel in the film would disrupt the continuity and the illusion of immediacy that Austen's readers expect, for they want to view the film in the same seamless way in which they read the novels. The content has been borrowed, but the medium has not been appropriated. (338)

This leads them to conclude that there is “no conscious interplay between media” (338) and that “the interplay happens, if at all, only for the reader or viewer who happens to know both versions and can compare them” (338). When it comes to film adaptations aiming for fidelity these observations may be accurate, but vlog adaptations work quite differently. Film adaptations seem to favor immediacy over hypermediacy but vlog adaptations are overtly hypermedial artifacts. Although technically the interplay still happens when viewers are familiar with both the novel and its vlog adaptations, the references are emphasized in a way the viewer knows they concern a reference to the novel.

The relationship with the novel is also highlighted by the viewer responses to the vlog entries. Popular vlogs often include Q&A-entries and popular⁸ vlog adaptations also participate in this convention. In the Q&A-videos of vlog adaptations the relationship between the novel and its vlog adaptation becomes especially overt because the interplay is employed both by the questions and the answers. One example is the Q&A-series of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. One of the viewer questions is cited: “if you were thrown in a vortex and woke up, say, in Victorian [sic] England how would you cope?” (LBD, “Questions and Answers #6, 1:37-1:45). Character Lizzie responds: “There wouldn’t be any technology or cars, um, so I guess I’d be walking everywhere. I’d probably have a lot of muddy

⁸ This convention is only used in popular vlogs and vlog adaptations because the Q&A’s use questions that were really asked by viewers and only popular vlogs get questions.

dresses” (LBD, “Questions and Answers #6, 1:46-1:54). This is a playful reference to the novel in which lead character Elisabeth wants to walk everywhere, to the aggravation of her mother because Elisabeth’s dresses always get muddy on her walks. Lizzie’s answer is therefore funny for viewers who understand the reference. Viewers who do not understand the reference will still understand there must be a reference because vloggers often try to make interesting answers to questions and without the reference the answer does not fit because it is too mundane. In both cases the viewer does not take the narrator as reliable because the answer is not meant to tell the truth but to bring across a reference to the novel.

Hypermediacy foregrounds the use of media and the materiality of a narrative. This logic of hypermediacy opposes the logic of immediacy by pointing out that the content of a narrative is not an unmediated direct experience, but instead a textual construct. Both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation are hypermediated artifacts which has the effect of making the reader or viewer perceive the narration as being unreliable due to this narrative structure. In both cases this unreliability happens on two levels: the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level. This leads to a circularity of cause and effect: hypermediacy leads to unreliability and unreliability in turn leads to hypermediacy, the visibility of the mediation. Hypermediacy may seem like a specific characteristic for digital media, but as this analysis shows, the vlog adaptation actually remediates a property which is overt in analog media like the epistolary novel as well.

Chapter three
Remediation: between assembly and fragmentation
Temporal effects of serialization

In this thesis I am analyzing the body of vlog adaptations that exists today. Some of these vlogs are finished, their stories are completed. Others remain incomplete and have been discontinued with no sign new episodes will be uploaded. And yet others are still running, partway through the story they want to tell, uploading a new vlog every week or so to continue the story. This ‘serialization’ of the narrative present in the vlog adaptation is not unique, it is borrowed from other media which utilizes serials in its genres, such as the epistolary novel, radio serials, and TV series. As Bolter and Grusin state: “the contemporary entertainment industry calls such borrowing “repurposing”: to take a “property” from one medium and re-use it in another” (339). This remediation does not mean all media are the same, because “with reuse comes a necessary redefinition” (Bolter and Grusin, 339). By including different properties from different media, the vlog adaptation creates its own genre with its own effects. In this chapter I will compare the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation by considering the assembly and fragmentation of the different parts of their series. I will then discuss how this leads to a different temporal experience.

The epistolary novel consists of a series of fictional letter narratives. This means the narrator is homodiegetic: he or she exists in the story he or she tells about in the narrative. The fictional addresser wrote the letters to the fictional addressee supposedly one after another. To scrutinize this statement it is important to look at the time-frame in which the story is told. Rimmon-Kenan (1983) distinguishes four types of storytelling in time: ulterior (past tense), anterior (future tense), simultaneous (present tense), and intercalated (past and future tense) narration. The epistolary novel is written in intercalated narration: each letter generally tells what happened between sending the last letter and the current letter and optionally tells about the near future as well. Together these fictional letters tell one story and the epistolary novel is the assembly of these letters. In the story world the letters appear one after another in the time-frame set in the letters. The reader however has the entire epistolary novel at his or her disposal and does not have to read the letters in the same time-frame as the supposed narratee. The assembly of the letters into the epistolary novel therefore modifies the temporal effect of letter writing and reading in general to the temporal effect of the novel.

The narration of the vlog adaptation closely resembles the epistolary novel. Whereas the novel that is adapted generally had a heterodiegetic narrator, the vlog adaptation adapts this to a serialized homodiegetic narrative. The many short⁹ vlog entries of the vlog adaptation use intercalated narration,

⁹ YouTube used to have a time restriction of 4 minutes on the videos that could be uploaded on the website. Even though the restriction is no longer used, most vlog entries are still roughly about this length. It is very rare to have a vlog entry that is longer than 10 minutes.

so each vlog entry consists of a little ulterior and anterior narration about the time in between these vlog entries. The vlog entries are however not assembled in the same way as the fictional letters in the epistolary novel. Instead of uploading all vlog entries at once, the vlog entries are uploaded consecutively, usually at a fixed frequency, like once a week (for example in *The autobiography of Jane Eyre*) or twice a week (for example in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*). In this aspect I argue that vlog adaptations remediate the conventions of the TV series. The remediation of TV series in vlog adaptations is indicated by the use of episode numbers. As with TV series the vlog entries of a vlog adaptation have episode numbers, which is something a real vlog would never have for lack of having a real beginning, middle and end, which renders an episode number irrelevant. The consecutive publication of the vlog entries means that a viewer has to wait for a new vlog entry to find out how the story continues, instead of being able to read on as with the epistolary novel. However, the publication of the vlog adaptations is cumulative: all the vlog entries which have been uploaded already are there for everyone to watch and once the vlog adaptation is finished, a viewer can watch all the vlog entries one after another. This however takes away some of the temporal experience which is a key aspect of digital media: real-time. The constant updatability of digital media give readers and viewers a real-time experience when consuming digital media texts. Real-time includes both instantaneousness, which means the viewer feels like he or she experiences the story world almost at the same as it is occurring, and simultaneousness, which means the viewer experiences the story world as paralleled to their own world in time. With vlog adaptations, and vlogs in general, the story time is parallel with the narration time. When a video is uploaded once a week, for example, this means that the viewer has to wait one week for the next vlog entry and that between two vlog entries one week of story time has progressed. This implies the real world and the story world are progressing at the same time and gives the illusion the distinction between real world and story world does not exist. Especially the long running vlog adaptations use this in their storyline by including holidays in their vlog entries. For example, *The Autobiography of Jane Eyre* uploaded a video called “Happy Holidays” on 25 December 2013. This creates the illusion that character Jane is celebrating Christmas at the same time, in the same world, as the viewers are. This real-time element is an important property specific to this genre. As Hank Green (2013), the creator of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, contemplates:

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries can never exist the way it did when it was happening, it can never be as rewarding as it was right when it was occurring [...] That real-time element in so many different facets, not just the stuff that we were doing on social media, but the stuff that the fans were doing [sic]. And I feel like that’s gone away now. I am never going to be able to feel that exact way again. And that’s kind of sad. (“Thoughts on Lizzie”, 3:21-3:59, Green)

This contemplation aptly shows the importance of real-time as a facet of serialisation in the vlog adaptation. Serialisation is a media property which the vlog adaptation remedies from TV series – as demonstrated above - in its consecutive publication and use of episode numbers. This does not mean

serialisation is simply copied by the vlog adaptation because the new use of serialisation appropriates it for the vlog adaptation. Serialisation of the vlog adaptation differs from serialisation of TV series which usually publishes episodes in a fixed frequency but has a variable progression in story time. The vlog adaptation on the other hand has a progression in story time paralleled with the publication time. This real-time facet redefines the serialised narrative as a property specifically for the vlog adaptation.

Due to the intercalated storytelling and physical existence of the narration in the story world of the vlog adaptation other characters can (fictionally) read letters and watch the vlog entries in the time between narrations. In the epistolary novel the options for this to happen are small because a character would have to find the letter. In the vlog adaptation however, the vlog entries are uploaded to YouTube are public both to the characters in the story world and the real viewers. In both cases the reader or viewers can only find out about this when it is included in later part of the narration. This factor is treated to various extents in the vlog. One example of a vlog which features a character watching the vlog adaptation is *Emma's journal* (2013). This is a vlog adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1915). In the novel the main character Emma insults minor character Miss Bates. She does not realise she did something wrong until she gets scolded by her friend Mr Knightley, after which she apologises to Miss Bates. This passage was transposed to the vlog adaptation by the creators who made the vlog part of the story world. In *Emma's Journal* Emma jokes about Patricia (Miss Bates in the novel) on camera and publishes it. This shows a similar result to the novel in which Emma insults Miss Bates in person. There is however one exception: in the vlog adaptation Emma's insults, Knightley's scolding and Emma's apologies to Patricia are necessarily public. Knightley asks Emma to turn off the camera before rebuking her, but Emma does not and she decides to publish it in her vlog, stating in her apology to Patricia:

I should not have said all those things about you and I should not have put them on the internet, that was very, *very* wrong, I'm apologizing to you and I'm putting *this* on the internet so people know that I was wrong. (EJ, Episode 14, 5:10-5:25, italics express emphasis in verbal original)

This aptly shows the role of the narrative in the story: the narrative becomes performative. Telling the story becomes part of the story itself. By making fun of Patricia in one of her vlog entries, Emma has insulted Patricia, angered Knightley, lost the respect of other people who saw the vlog entry. By making a vlog entry in which she apologises the narrative itself becomes the apology. As Zylinska states: "blogs are not just commentaries on someone's life but materializations of it" (62, in Brillenburg Wurth, 2012). This is an element that could only happen because of the serialisation of the story and cumulative nature of the publication. Without the fragmentation of the narrative a part of the narration itself could not have been cause for future narration.

Both in the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation there is a serialisation of the narrative structure. Their temporal effects are different since the epistolary novel consists of an assembly of a series whereas the vlog adaptation in fragmentation of the series in real-time. This shows how properties of one medium are repurposed into another medium, without it being a copy. Both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation use the serialisation by way of a homodiegetic narrator who uses intercalated narration to tell a story. But the vlog adaptation uses the real-time element of the internet to contribute to the story, which characterises the vlog adaptation as a genre.

Conclusion

Between showing and hiding

The vlog adaptation as a remediation of the epistolary novel

The range of existing media is ever-changing and always consists of a wide variety of media and genres at any given time in history. The creation of new media and the development of older media always consists of a process in which the properties of other media are remediated. The interaction between different media shows that new media do not evolve in a linear fashion. Taking a linear understanding of media evolution, the vlog (adaptation) would have to be understood as the successor of the film (adaptation). Yet as I have shown in this thesis, the narrative structure of the genre of the vlog adaptation can be understood in new and more accurate ways: by creating a media-history that displays its non-linear connections to the genre of the epistolary novel, which had its peak in popularity nearly three hundred years ago. Although these genres each use different media as devices – written text and video – a key element of the narrative structure of both genres is the relationship between showing and hiding. Brillenburg Wurth (2012) states:

As a body of literature, is the page not already a screen, or a “screenic” mode? Screens are things to *hide* things with, or *project* things onto. Screens are frames, or rather, *they frame*, and framing is crucial to literature as it is a condition of possibility for fiction – a demarcation of the imaginary. (2, italics H.A.)

Throughout my thesis the act of hiding and of projecting, or showing, have implicitly been important elements in my analysis of the vlog adaptation as well as the epistolary novel. Together these elements consist in the act of framing that defines this narrative structure. In this thesis I have argued Bolter and Grusin’s concepts of immediacy, hypermediacy and remediation (1996) are useful tools to examine the narrative structure of the vlog adaptation in comparison to the epistolary novel. By giving an experience of immediacy these genres both show and hide their mediation. As I have argued in chapter one in both the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation the conventions of a non-fictional genre – letter writing and vlogging – are used to create a fictional genre – the epistolary novel and the vlog adaptation. By using the narrative structure of a non-fictional genre, they create an experience of authenticity, an erasure of the mediation of the storyline. Truthfulness thus becomes a trope in literary fiction.

Nevertheless this experience of immediacy is both complemented and contrasted by the experience of hypermediacy. As I have argued in chapter two both the epistolary novel and vlog adaptation are multimedial products, which foregrounds the mediation in addition to trying to erase it. By making the very act of narration and mediation part of the projection the unreliability of the narrator becomes overt. By showing the unreliability of the narrator it becomes clear that the narrator is actually hiding a part of the truth.

Even though they contrast each other immediacy and hypermediacy also rely on each other. Both elements are significant in the process of remediation because remediation “is justified because it fills a lack or repairs a fault in its predecessor, because it fulfils the unkept promise of an older medium” (Bolter and Grusin, 351). Each new medium is created both from the desire for an unmediated experience and the fascination with mediation itself. Together this leads to a new medium which uses properties of other media. As I have argued in chapter three repurposing a property into new media leads to a redefinition of the ‘essence’ of this property. One example is the serialisation of narrative, which is present in both the epistolary novel and vlog adaptation but which nevertheless has a different temporal effect. Whereas the epistolary novel can be regarded as the assembly of a narrative into a novel, the vlog adaptation is characterised by fragmentation, which leads to a real-time experience. This shows the viewer a real-time experience but only when the viewer watches the vlog entries simultaneously with its publication. This temporal experiences afterwards becomes hidden just like in the epistolary novel when a reader or viewer has the entire narrative at his or her disposal.

Taking the vlog adaptation out of the linear relationship between the source text and its adaptation I analysed the new genre in a non-linear way to show the complexity of the remediation of narrative structures, linking it to a much older genre. This criticizes “the notion of history as a dustbin” (Weber in Brillenburg Wurth, 28). Weber states: “nothing is more characteristic of Western modernity than this attempt to set up a clear-cut opposition between the New and the Old, an opposition that also implies – as oppositions always do – a hierarchy” (Weber in Brillenburg Wurth, 28). Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation is an effective tool to deconstruct this dichotomy between old and new and show how media are constantly being reused and repositioned. The vlog is a new medium, the vlog adaptation a new genre, but it is the remediation of other media and genres that gives the vlog adaptation its specific characteristics. By reviewing the genre as a remediation of the epistolary novel the vlog adaptation can be understood as a literary genre for its use of narrative structure both repurposes and repositions the epistolary novel.

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Appendix

Title vlog	Channel name vlog	Year(s) of publication	Stage	Title novel (source text)	Author novel	Year of publication novel	Professional or amateur production
<i>The Lizzie Bennet Diaries</i>	The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (formerly TheLizzieBennet)	2012-2013	Finished (100 Episodes)	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Jane Austen	1813	Professional
<i>Emma Wood</i>	Emma's Journal	2013	Finished (19 episodes)	<i>Emma</i>	Jane Austen	1815	Amateur
<i>The Autobiography of Jane Eyre</i>	Jane Eyre	2013-present	Still running (92 episodes so far)	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Charlotte Brontë	1847	Professional
<i>The Dashwood Diaries</i>	Dashwood Diaries	2013	Discontinued (7 episodes)	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	Jane Austen	1811	Amateur
<i>Enlightened by Emma</i>	Emma Woodhouse	2013	Discontinued (3 episodes)	<i>Emma</i>	Jane Austen	1815	Amateur
<i>Emma Approved</i>	Pemberly Digital	2013-present	Still Running (50 episodes so far)	<i>Emma</i>	Jane Austen	1815	Professional
<i>Emma Woodhouse Diaries</i>	Ann Hill	2013	Finished (13 episodes)	<i>Emma</i>	Jane Austen	1819	Amateur