Beyond culture vs. structure

The networks, habits and resistances of our digital times

Associate Professor Alana Lentin, Western Sydney University
Amsterdam, March 2 2020

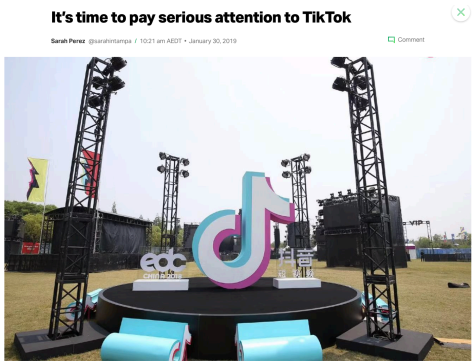
Lecture Outline

Introduction: Is TikTok structural or cultural?

Updates: Networks and habits

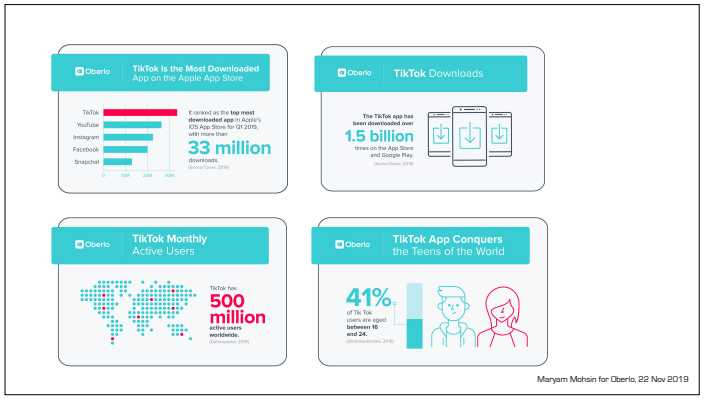
Resistances: 'Dark Sousveillance'

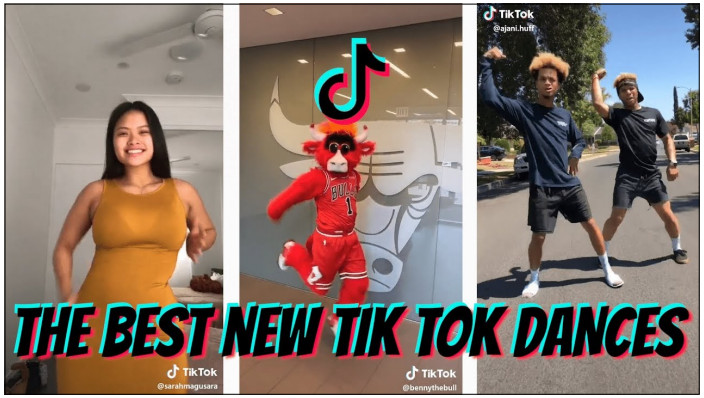
Summary



Sarah Perez, TechCrunch, Jan 30 2019

TikTok is an app
And it's like an Instagram for Gen Z, with cool dances
That you can watch and share cool videos on


Oberlo
TikTok Is the Most Downloaded App on the Apple App Store
TikTok
Youtube
Instagram
Facebook
Snapchat
0
10M
20M
30M
It ranked as the top most downloaded app in Apple's iOS App Store for Q1 2019, with more than
33 million
downloads.
Oberlo
TikTok Downloads
The TikTok app has been downloaded over
1.5 billion
times on the App Store and Google Play.
Oberlo
TikTok Monthly Active Users
TikTok has
500 million
active users worldwide.
Oberlo
TikTok App Conquers the Teens of the World
41%
of Tik Tok users are aged between 16 and 24.
Maryam Mohsin for Oberlo, 22 Nov 2019

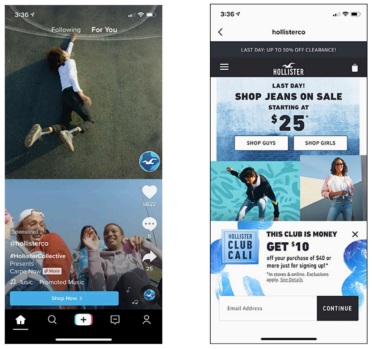

TikTok
@ajani.hulff
THE BEST NEW TIK TOK DANCES
TikTok
@sarahmagusara
TikTok
@bennythebull

'[A] central recurring contrast in sociological theorizing is that between "culture and social structure". The key problem with this usage, of course, is its implication that culture is not structured.'

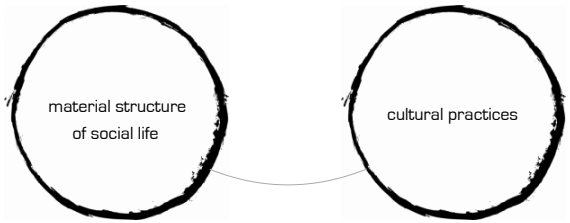
-Sharon Hays (1994)

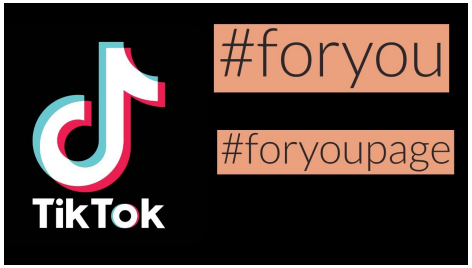
'"soft", infinitely malleable, "free-floating" ideas...'

-Sharon Hays (1994)



I LOVE YOU TIK
TOK


material structure
of social life
cultural practices

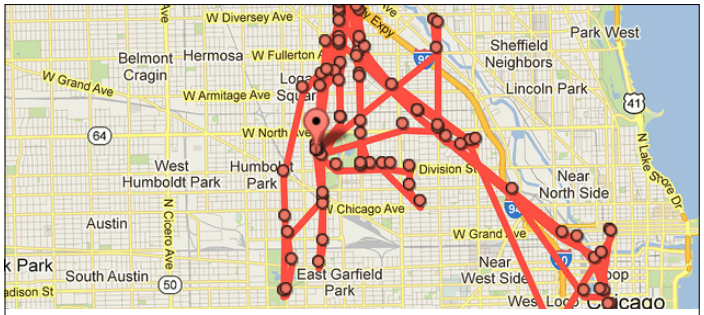

#foryou
#foryoupage
TikTok

A ‘sophisticated self-learning algorithm that curates the individual user experience by constantly learning from user’s viewing habits and -preferences.’

– Lukas Beckenbauer, 23 September 2019

‘Common things that have been noticed are people who represent conventional beauty standards… no strong political opinions… and no violations of the most reactive local social norms.’

–Genevieve Patterson & Hannah Davidson, Tech Crunch, 18 February 2020



Google location tracking

'By the time we understand something it has already disappeared or changed.'

–Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Updating to Remain the Same' (2017)

'We are now in a different and perhaps historically unique situation: we are forever mapping, forever performing – and so we are told, forever empowered – and yet no more able to imagine, let alone decisively intervene in, the world around us.'

–Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Updating to Remain the Same' (2017)

Networks & Habits

Network culture (Tiziana Terranova 2004)

Networked publics (danah boyd 2010)

The networked self (Zizi Papacharissi 2010)

Imagined networks (Wendy Hui Kyong Chun 2017)

'The network has become the dominant cultural logic.'

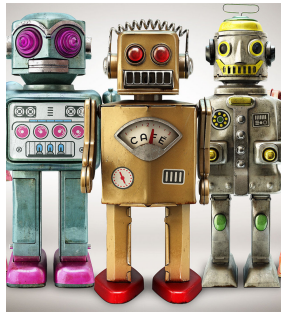
–Kazys Varnelis, Networked Publics (2008)

Network culture = information overload

But, humans won't be governed by machines

We can use networks in productive ways

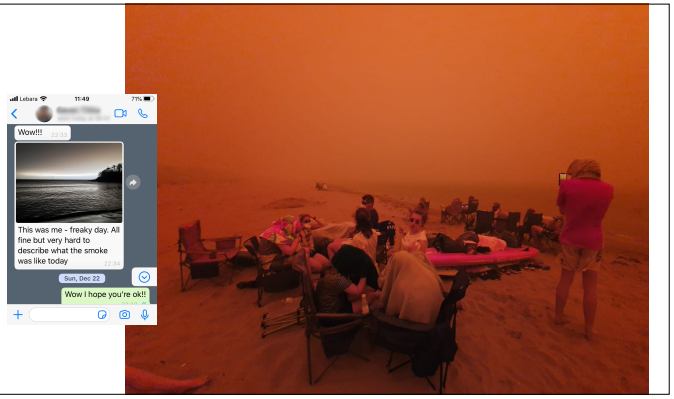
Terranova (2004)



Networked Publics

Teen social spaces may change, but the need to connect remains the same.

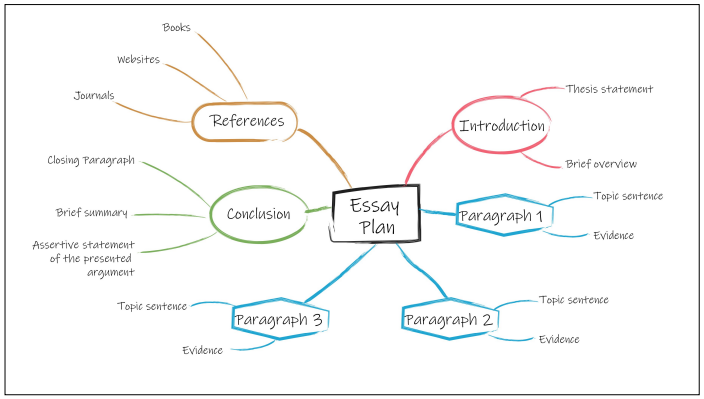
danah boyd, it's complicated

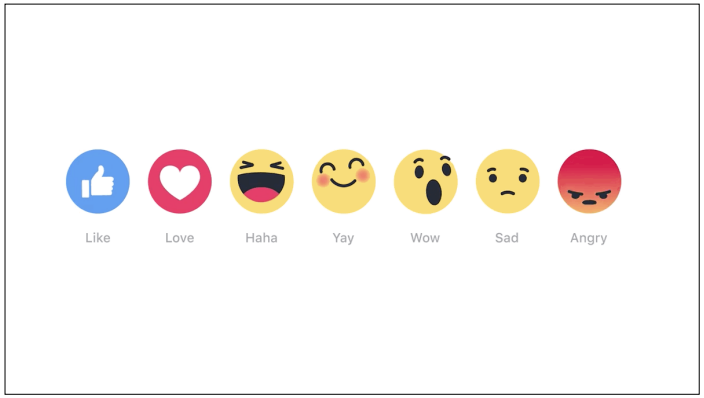


many YOUS, no WE

Wendy Chun - Crisis + Habit = Update

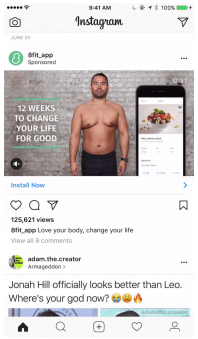
'Bored, overwhelmed and anxious all at once.'
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2017)


Essay Plan
References
Books
Websites
Journals
Introduction
Thesis statement
Brief overview
Conclusion
Closing Paragraph
Brief summary
Assertive statement of the presented argument
Paragraph 1
Topic sentence
Evidence
Paragraph 3
Topic sentence
Evidence
Paragraph 2
Topic sentence
Evidence

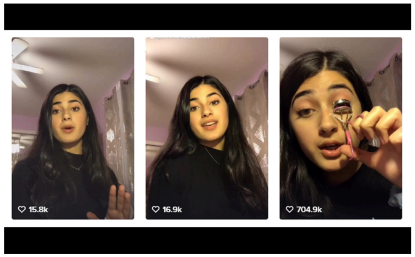

Like
Love
Haha
Yay
Wow
Sad
Angry

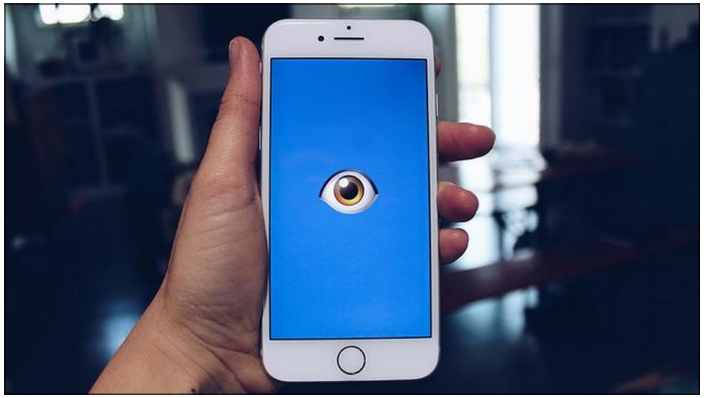
'Corporate uses of big data [are interested] in amplifying certain existing behaviours and pre-empting others'

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2017)



TikTok Apologizes After Banning A Teen Whose Video About Muslims In China Went Viral





mass loitering

'be in public – claim public space –
and not be attacked'

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2017)

Dark sousveillance

This Young Labour Politician Was Targeted By Racist Trolls After Her Speech On Refugees Went Viral

When an old video of Newham councillor Seyi Akiwowo resurfaced it triggered a wave of vile abuse.

Posted on February 7, 2017, at 3:33 a.m.

Victoria Sanusi
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Be one of the first to comment ↓

Pablo Garrigos

Seyi Akiwowo

GL!TCH

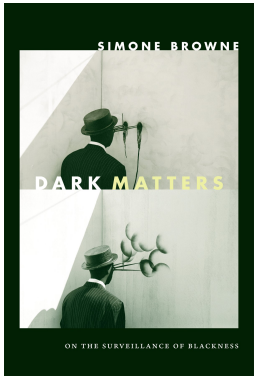
Fix the glitch to end online abuse

Sous (under)

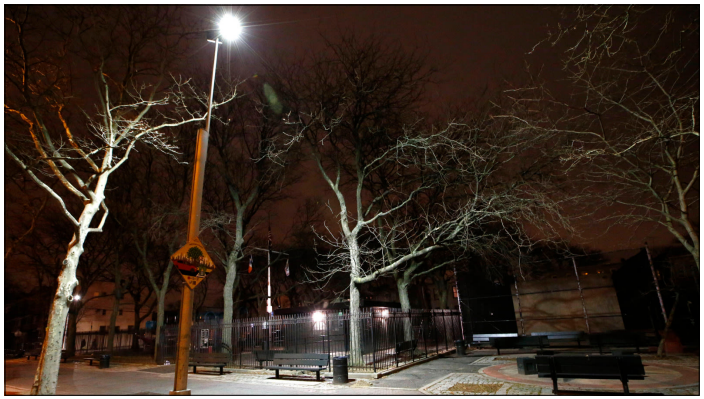
Sur (over)

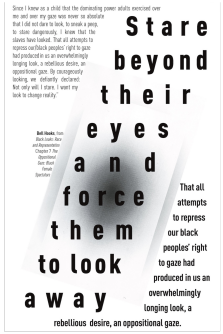
Surveillance studies need to centre the history of slavery.

Simone Browne, Dark Matters (2015)



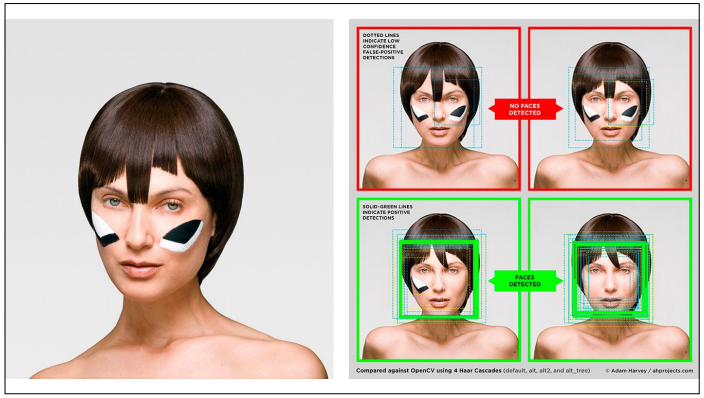
New York slave revolt, 1712




Since I knew as a child that the dominating power adults exercised over me and over my gaze was never so absolute that I did not dare to look, to sneak a peep, to stare dangerously, I knew that the slaves have looked. That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelmingly longing look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality.'
bell hooks, from Black Look: Race and Representation Chapter 7 The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators
Stare beyond their eyes and force them to look away
That all attempts to repress our black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelmingly longing look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze.

DISCOUNT
OPTICAL
BOUTIQUE

From the film, 'Coded Bias'
by Shalini Kantayya



Campaign by the LA-based anti-surveillance movement,
Stop LAPD Spying

Conclusion

Cultural sociology requires a 'Geertzian "thick description" of the codes, narratives, and symbols that create the textured webs of social meaning.'

-Jeffrey Alexander, The Meanings of Social Life (2003: 13).

Example group activity

Activity 1

- Choose a TikTok video.
- Describe the cultural references mobilised
- Consider the social phenomenon being commented on
- Note the emotions conveyed

Activity 2

- Script your own 15 seconds video on a subject of concern to you
- List 3 elements that need to be included to make the video succeed as a social text