

‘Let me be your TV’ (Phillips 1996, 1)

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ABSTRACT

Mobile media enable immediate and continuous connections as well as ubiquitous producing, sharing and consuming of audio-visual material. This article analyses the conceptualisation of ultra-short media forms and media convergence on *Vine*. The article is based mainly on the analysis of examples of the *Vine* users Thomas Sanders, the NBA and the America’s Funniest Home Videos, illustrating the aesthetics and content enabled by ultra-short communications. The term para-social interaction, as applied by Horton and Wohl (1956) in the context of mass media, is adapted to *Vine* as social media, highlighting the performance of intimacy in communication mediated with digital tools.

KEYWORDS

ultrashort, vine, mobile, intimacy, para-social

Ultrashort

‘Throughout the year, we’ve connected with each other and shared spontaneous moments, hilarious jokes, meaningful events and, really, our lives.’ (*Vine* team 2014, 1)

24 January 2013 *Twitter* launched the video app *Vine* for the *iPhone* and *iPod touch*; an *android* version followed 3 June of the same year (Hofmann 2013a; Haider 2013).¹ *Vine* allows the user to record, upload and share looped videos of up to six seconds, a very limited duration that expands *Twitter*’s concept for text into audio-visual communication. As a result of technological, social, and economic convergences these mini clips radicalise an already existing media trend for abbreviation: out-of-home displays or urban screens, internet based video platforms, film festivals, advertisement and marketing, wayfinding with digital signage, instructions as well as art and multiple mobile applications use very short moving images with or without sound.² The first main char-

¹ 27 October 2016 *Vine* announced that the mobile app will be discontinued in the next months (Team Vine & Twitter 2016, 1). No further explanation was provided, but at the same time parent company *Twitter* gave notice of general efforts to cut costs among others by restructuring sales, partnerships, and marketing and reducing their number of employees by 9% (TwitterIR 2016, 8). Apparently *Vine* was re-evaluated, too: At the beginning *Vine* was very successful regarding the number of users, posts and overall views, but struggled with stagnant user growth and top users leaving for competitors during the last year (McAlone 2016, 1).

² The *SNF* (*Swiss National Science Foundation*) *Project Ultrashort* considers all these various, extremely short, moving images as a discrete media format, proposing the term ‘ultrashort’ to mark their singularity

acteristic of these ultrashorts is obviously their extremely reduced duration, usually in the range of seconds. The second characteristic is that they are no longer subjected to one media apparatus – film, television, mobile, or computer – but transgress media boundaries and are increasingly present in different contexts and on a variety of displays. The design of the *Vine* application is a reflection of the convergences of media and an attempt to brand it as something new, no longer part of traditional technologies:

‘Vine is a video service without a play button. This was intentional. Old things are beautiful, but new things should look, well... new. That’s why Vine doesn’t have a play button. It also doesn’t have a pause button, a timeline scrubber, a blinking red light, or dials and a brushed-metal finish to give you the impression that you’re using a dusty video camera. There’s only one nod to traditional filmmaking — the create button, which is an abstracted video camera.’ (Yusupov 2013, 1)

Once the create button is activated, the video can be recorded by simply touching anywhere on the screen of the smartphone. Lifting the finger stops and touching again resumes the recording of up to six seconds, when it stops automatically. The same application recording the audio-visual material can also be used to distribute and watch. Additionally, the possibility to embed *Vines* on web pages was offered, starting 29 March 2013 (Hofmann 2013b), thus freeing the material from the limiting frame of the smartphone. While the earlier *Vine* homepage only showed a selection of ultrashorts, since 3 January 2014 all of them can be shared and watched on said homepage even in TV mode – another nod to media convergence – showing videos no longer looped, but in sequence and full screen (Det 2014, 1). Finally, on 20 August 2014 *Vine* added the possibility to import already existing videos, edit them to six seconds and share those thereby further dissolving the former boundaries of the smartphone medium. (Plom 2014, 1)

Although the ultrashorts of *Vine* can now be seen on the web or imported from other sources, the smartphone is still the means of creating them, by either filming or editing. The omnipresent camera, the renewed convergence of a recording and playback device not unlike analogue tape or video recorders, turn recipients into prosumers, caught in-between consuming and producing media content (Jenkins 2006; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). This change from a viewer to a user (Manovich 2001), the convergence of consuming and producing, of interaction and participation are vital for *Vine* as social media. The ultrashorts on *Vine* are a social practice encouraging interaction, engagement and participation by ease of use and the gratification of instant feedback. With both a length of only six seconds and a recording tool that is also dedicated sharing platform even further facilitating use, *Vine* seems unfazed by data and bandwidths limitations. The digital market research company *Tubular Labs*, engaged in cross-platform video analyt-

as something different from traditional long films or videos. To enhance the uniqueness of their format *Vine* usually refers to its content as ‘vines’.

ics, estimates that by now over three million new videos are published online every day (Watt 2016). Although *Tubular Labs* analyses audio-visual content from thirty different sources, including longer forms on *YouTube*, the increase in the number of online videos and their multimedia-based uses point to a continuously growing and technically optimised market. The proliferation and democratisation of moving images online pursue a tendency previously seen in photography, whose social functions first changed with the analogue consumer cameras and underwent further change with the omnipresent digital cameras. José van Dijck (2008) considers that for digital photography the construction of identity and the communication of experiences got equally important as remembrance. This can be applied to *Vine* as well: Essential parts of *Vine* are not only the possibility to record and share, but to follow others, to ‘revine’ (forward), remix³ or remake the material of other users (Bauer 2015, 1), or to use *Vine messages* for video conversations with friends. The ultrashort duration is vital for this immediate and continuous exchange, since it lowers the effort of producing material and allows for a prompt and broad dissemination.

Storytime

A man takes a video shot of himself, looking into the camera he says ‘storytime’. Next he approaches a couple sitting opposite each other outside a restaurant, close to the street. He says ‘This was the moment the lad would propose to the girl.’ While he is speaking the couple turn to look at him. Finally, hand to her mouth, the girl stares slightly shocked at her boyfriend. He says ‘No!’ to her, moving his right hand in a gesture to indicate stop, hold on. Then he repeats the ‘No’ directed towards the man with the camera.

This is the complete plot of an ultrashort on *Vine*, with the caption ‘Narrating People’s Lives: at the Café! (I think I went too far XD) [Emoticon of a Coffee Cup]’ (Sanders 2014a). The man with the camera phone is Thomas Sanders, a user of *Vine* with 1,433 posts, 8 million followers and an overall loop count of 6,673,308,515 (as of 17 August 2016). ‘Narrating People’s Lives’ is a series of *Vine* posts he made, that was shared, revined and remade by other users on *Vine* as well as on different platforms like *YouTube* in the form of compilations.

Sanders always starts the ultrashorts of this series with a shot of himself saying ‘storytime’, then follows with a sentence apparently describing the situation he sees before him, which he simultaneously interprets in a surprising way. The suspense and fun reside in the unpredictable reactions of the people he films and whose stories he claims to tell: Sanders begins with the shot of himself saying ‘storytime’ as usual. Then he proceeds with a shot of two people sitting on a bench, an older man on one end and a

³ Since 18 November 2015 it is possible to use the sound of an already existing *Vine* post and add this to a newly recorded or imported video by touching the button ‘Make an audio remix’. This will load the sound of the existing post into the smartphones memory ready to use with the new material.

young woman on the other one further away. While Sanders moves closer, he says ‘The man came to the bus stop every day to pick up hot chicks.’ The woman is reading a book and, although she seems to register that someone is talking, does not relate this to herself or chooses to ignore it, until towards the end. The man turns to the young woman, she finally looks at him and laughs; he turns back to Sanders, raises his eyebrows and makes a thumbs up sign. (Sanders 2014b)

Another ultrashort shows Sanders in a supermarket, in front of a shelf saying the customary ‘storytime’. He approaches a young man standing at a counter with fruit, weighing two melons in his hands. Sanders states: ‘As he squeezed the melons he pictured them as the hearts of his enemies.’ The young man looks at Sanders, back to the melons, returns to Sanders and questioningly says something unintelligible. (Sanders 2013)

A search of *Vine* for ‘Thomas Sanders’ currently produces 21,400 results, 1,433 of which were posted by him. ‘Narrating people’s lives’ narrows findings down to 385 posts, ‘narrating people’s life’ garners an additional 37 results (as of 15 August 2016). The examples described until now are the top three results of a *Vine* search for ‘narrating people’s lives’ repeated in November 2015, February and August 2016. The logic behind the order of the search results remains hidden – it is neither by date nor by loop count nor alphabetical order of title. Not all of the 385 results are ultrashorts made or distributed by Sanders either, some are just revined copies of his posts in the timelines of other users; some are remakes based on the concept of ‘Narrating People’s Lives’ but produced by someone else. One of the latter is an ultrashort by Vincent Marcus that Thomas Sanders revined in turn: Marcus first films a shot of himself, saying ‘storytime’. He then approaches Sanders who is standing with two other men on the street talking. Due to the speed of Marcus’s approach, the sudden closeness and surprise, Sanders jerks away first when Marcus addresses him with the words: ‘How does it feel for the narrator to become the narrated?’ Sanders replies: ‘Very awkward!’ (Marcus 2015)

If an ultrashort lasts only six seconds a classic narrative pattern of exposition, conflict and resolution is often skipped in favour of either a shot of one moment in time or a two act structure of now/then, good/bad, me/you or other similar dualisms. The first shot of Thomas Sanders saying ‘storytime’ introduces him as the author and the concept of this series of ultrashorts: he tells a story, his chosen key word points towards parents reading bedtime stories to their children or story times held at preschools or libraries and evokes associations of fairy tales or fiction, thereby contrasting the title of the ultrashorts ‘Narrating People’s Lives’. The second shot of Sanders’ ultrashorts consists of a description of the situation in one single sentence and the reactions of the protagonists. Analytically, a three act structure might still be applied here – act one: Sanders’ introduction (exposition); act two: description (conflict), act three: reaction (resolution) – but the description and reaction usually merge with each other. The clearer distinction seems to be a dualistic one, like those proposed by Vincent Marcus of narrator and narrated. This is especially so, because the depicted moments are so brief and there is barely time for the development of a conflict other than one of narrator and narrated. Sanders first addresses his audience looking directly into the camera, then while the camera perspective

changes from him to the protagonists, he turns into the invisible, omniscient, third-person narrator. Still, due to the dissonance of what Sanders says about the protagonists' lives with their real lives and perceptions, the viewer has to ignore the offered narration and create his own. The ultrashorts are completed in the mind of the viewer, who hears Sanders' sentence, sees the reaction of the protagonists, and adds his own interpretations and knowledge of social habits to gain a narrative experience that extends beyond the actual moving images.

Thomas Sanders shares on *Vine* not only narrations of other people's lives but also of his own, with ultrashorts of his everyday life, his friends, his family, or his favourite posts of others. Additionally he uses *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *YouTube*, applying a cross platform strategy to increase publicity.

The platform *Vine* does not cater exclusively to either media professionals or amateurs and shows a broad variety of users, skills, styles, interests and themes. In June 2016, Thomas Sanders was the most watched *Vine* user (#1, 250 million views) according to an evaluation of *Tubular Labs* (Marshall 2016), a rank he held several times previously. Among the ten most watched *Vine* users five belong to the category comedy (Thomas Sanders, America's Funniest Home Videos, Lele Pons, Mastodon, Kenny Knox), four to sports (NBA, Bleacher Report, SportsCenter, MLB) and one to people and blogs (Sarah Schauer). NBA (National Basketball Association, #2, 234 million views), Bleacher Report (an American digital media company focussing on sport, #3, 165 million views), America's Funniest Home Videos (an American reality television program on ABC, #4, 128 million views), SportsCenter (a sports news television program of the American cable and satellite television network ESPN, #5, 123 million views) and MLB (Major League Baseball, #8, 68 million views) are companies' representatives on *Vine*. Thomas Sanders, Lele Pons (#6, 90 million views), Mastodon (#7, 76 million views), Sarah Schauer (#9, 76 million views) and Kenny Knox (#10, 74 million views) are independent individual users.

In June 2016, the NBA ranked second among the most watched *Vine* users. A search of *Vine* for 'NBA' leads to 190,600 results, 4,261 of which were posted by the NBA (as of 15 August 2016). The six last postings are tagged as 'flash portraits' and show posed photographs of NBA players with animated flashes in the background (NBA 2016). The flashes and a zoom closing in on the players are the only movements. Further ultrashorts on the NBA's *Vine* channel include instants of basketball games with spectacular shots or passes, making fun while warming up for a game or recreational playing in a park. The focus is usually either on a decisive moment of a game or the depiction of a player. As is the case with Thomas Sanders, the NBA follows a cross platform strategy with content on *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*.

America's Funniest Home Videos occupied the fourth⁴ place in *Tubular Labs* ranking and is present on *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* as well. A search of *Vine* for 'America's Funniest Home Videos' produces 2,556 results, the abbreviation 'AFV' finds 2,281 posts. 802 ultrashorts were uploaded on the official *Vine* channel of America's Funniest Home Videos (AFV 2016). The posts feature homemade videos submitted by the viewers to ABC/America's Funniest Home Videos. The most recent uploads (as of 15 August 2016) show a woman working out in her car during a stop at an intersection by repeatedly pushing a dumbbell through the open car roof, filmed apparently from the car behind hers. The soundtrack consists of a snippet of the song 'Eye of the Tiger' by the rock band Survivor, referring to the boxing film *Rocky III*, the caption reads 'When you're working out but bae is home alone.' Another ultrashort's first shot is situated at a gymnastics competition. A female gymnast on the balance beam falters and falls. In that moment on the soundtrack a man can be heard saying 'oh!'. The next shot focuses on the face of, presumably, the gymnast, speaking very fast: 'It's really nice, 'cause I feel that all my hard work in the gym has paid off', with a caption reading 'Well...' A third ultrashort shows a woman disguised in a black mask and cloak as Darth Vader. 'The Imperial March (Darth Vader's theme)' sounds in the background while she walks through a living room towards the camera and trips on her cloak, with the caption 'Vader looks different in the new trailer.' To appreciate these ultrashorts knowledge of colloquialisms (to translate the term *bae* to boyfriend) as well as of popular culture is necessary, otherwise a sufficiently fast decoding wouldn't be possible for the viewers.

In all of the cases above cross-platform dissemination and serialisation are prevalent. Serialisation offers the opportunity to tell a story in several progressing instalments, with an overall story arc, or as standalones from different perspectives. 'Narrating People's Lives' consists of several ultrashorts that are linked, only some of them by Sanders, by their title or hashtag, their concept and structure. These ultrashorts work without their companions, but the viewing experience is enhanced by the collation of more than one. First, the viewer understands the media format's logic and knows there are no parts missing, that what they sees is not an incomplete film for cinema or television but meant to be this short and intended for an altogether different viewing situation. Furthermore, the viewer knows what to expect because they recognise the title or style, a huge advantage for ultrashorts because everything that is self-explanatory speeds up the process of understanding and helps to deal with the time limitations. Second, a brand or idea can be established through serialisation as exemplified by the NBA channel, focusing solely on NBA players and games. On *Vine* this branding is possible at minimal cost, since the material used is often produced with little effort, as exemplified by the flash portraits, repurposed or a byproduct of shooting for TV. Third, a topic can be shown from different perspectives, with different protagonists, settings or places, as Thomas Sanders or America's Funniest Home Videos demonstrate. Their many self-

⁴ The Bleacher Report on *Vine* represents a variation of the NBA channel, showing videos of a broader scope of sports and athletes, therefore I will forgo a more detailed description even though the Bleacher Report ranked third in *Tubular Labs* evaluation for June 2016.

contained stories coexist parallel to each other, joined by the context of the respective *Vine* users and a consistent narration based on the implied fun of verbal pranks, strange behaviour or embodied fails. While television series, sequels of films or novels employ serialisation as well, it has special value for *Vine*: The limitations of the six seconds for the stories can be compensated, resuming the narration in several ultrashorts or showing a multitude of related stories. The successful *Vine* channels post new material frequently and with consistent contents, topics or aesthetics. Thus they allow the users to form expectations and entice them to come back, to follow or interact by comments, revines, or remakes.

Para-social Interaction

Lei Zhang, Feng Wang and Jiangchuan Liu analysed the data of 1,151,938 *Vine* users and one of their arguments concerns the numbers of followers (an average 244,4) versus following (an average 102,4). The disparity of these numbers indicates many users following a few user 'stars'. Zhang et al. conclude that social relations between the follower and the followed on *Vine* don't depend on offline relationships but on the attractiveness of the content offered by the followed user. The attraction might lie in the topic interesting the follower, as indicated for example by the sports channels. Evidenced by the comedy channels, humour can attract high view counts just as appealing or unusual aesthetics. The NBA's flash portraits for example are well composed photographs, with a far better image quality than the majority of the content on *Vine*, distinguished further by the restriction of movement to the animated flashes and zoom. Equally significant as the attractiveness of content is those of participation, since the ultrashorts on *Vine* are intended to provoke interactions. Through a series of recorded and shared posts, comments, the user profile in general, *Vine*'s ultrashorts perform the self or brand of a user, enable expectations, continuous interactions and relations. Apparent by the sheer number of their followers, for the most watched *Vine* users interpersonal two-way communication, although technically possible, is not a reliable option. Likes, comments or shares are too easily missed, when a user has millions of followers and views. Therefore *Vine* seems to fall between tertiary and quaternary media: Tertiary media like the TV are one-way communication still, but both sides use technical devices. Quaternary media use devices on both sides and the interpersonal communication is two-way. (Hipfl and Hug 2006, 22) Although mutual interpersonal communication is possible with *Vine*, it is limited by the amount of users trying to interact, which raises the question, how and what kind of interactions and relationships are established.

In 1956, Donald Horton and Richard R. Wohl introduced the theory of para-social interaction. The emergence of the term para-social interaction questions the interactions and relationships found in mass media and signifies the construction of a slightly biased theoretical framework. If interpersonal two-way communication is what para-social interaction mimics, the latter is obviously considered a substitute for the 'real thing'. According to Horton and Wohl (1956) moderators of TV shows often try to create an

illusion of normal social interaction and an intimate closeness, similar to unmediated interpersonal relationships. Usually, a media persona is more reliable and predictable than a 'normal person' due to the fact that they adopt a role for the show, presented regularly at the same time and place. This stability of a media persona and the repeated perception of their specific serial media form, allow for the development of para-social interactions or even para-social relationships. Tilo Hartmann stresses the fact that this para-social interaction is more than a feeling of kinship with fictional or non-fictional characters, but should be considered as a symbolically interactionist process (2016, 82). During the last decade the concept of para-social interaction has been applied to social media platforms. Lauren I. Labrecque points out that recent research indicates para-social interactions can evolve in isolated, non-serial media forms and that even a persona might not be necessary (2014, 135). 'PSI forms through message cues that increase perceived interactivity' and 'signal openness in communication.' (Labrecque 2014, 136) Fast responses, indicators of direct two-way communication like 'eye contact' and revealing information outside the persona's fixed role increase the feeling of interactivity and intimate knowledge.

With 'Narrating People's Lives' Thomas Sanders offers a para-social persona, the storyteller who ordinarily is situated in the privacy of the childhood home but can be encountered in public libraries, bars or the like. This persona is as stable as the design of 'Narrating People's Lives': his looks don't change, his behaviour stays the same (approaching others by surprise, making fun of them), the overall narrative structure of his ultrashorts is not altered. Thanks to his other *Vine* posts, *Twitter* and *YouTube* additional information is revealed that exceeds the role of his persona, thereby heightening the illusion of interpersonal two-way communication. The design of Sanders' ultrashorts enhances the illusion of a para-social interaction, furthering the impression of an individual persona and viewer and their continuous relationship.

The concept of authenticity becomes highly relevant to indicate signal openness and potential interactivity, although authenticity is not inherent in the media material but the result of an unspoken negotiation. The consumer decides to trust – or not to trust – the authenticity of the presented material based on their experiences and knowledge, the formal means of representation (language, image, sound, body, discourse, immediacy) and its context as signals for authenticity. (Manfred Hattendorf 1994, 75)⁵ The detected authenticity is an effect of the representation – the cues to guide the reading of the story – that show this perception as an individual and social practice: A poor quality of the images or sounds may turn into a cue for an unaltered documentation of an important moment instead of an incompetent media production. Immediacy is assumed when the character of the images as 'something made' is successfully repudiated. The apparent

⁵ Roger Odin's *lecture documentarisante* is based on a similar assumption: a film is not a documentary sui generis but because the viewer decides to regard it as one. A *lecture fictivisante* would deny a documentary value of the film. The term documentary for Odin no longer describes a genre but a documentary ensemble, which depends on the perception and knowledge of the viewer, stylistic elements of the film and sociocultural, historical and cinematographic institutions. (2000)

immediacy of a recording adds to the impression of its authenticity. America's Funniest Home Videos or Thomas Sanders' 'Narrating People's Lives', look like more or less spontaneous shots of everyday life, as if they are recorded and shared fast. Cues within the depicted content, like visually intruding into personal space, or hearing allegedly private tales as in Sanders' *Vine* posts or the leisure moments of NBA players, support the impression of intimate closeness. The ultrashorts of basketball games are read as approved documents because of their content – the moment of a perfect shot, highly emotionally attributed with uniqueness – or the audio-visual remains of a former life in TV – like broadcaster logos, text inserts of the score, or sounds of a cheering audience. The overall notion is that these are snapshots, documents, unforeseeable impressions of actuality without editing, thus enhancing the idea of showing people's lives – something unique, personal and private. This is aided by the smartphone offering every user the means to become a prosumer, to produce, store, share or consume their own audio-visual material, thus raising at the same time the expectation of the availability of said personal, private material.

On *Vine*, all forms of material, users and interactions mix. Originally private ultrashorts like fail videos coexist with public ultrashorts like repurposed TV material. *Vine* channels with only a few followers can offer ordinary social interactions by interpersonal two-way communication, but those channels with numerous followers depend on para-social interaction to establish social relationships with the majority of the users.

Intimacy

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas described the boundaries, interactions and interdependencies developed for the private and public spheres from the eighteenth century through to the mass societies of the twentieth century. Shaped in the intimate spheres of domesticity, individuals counteract the political authority of the government through critical public discourse and the emergence of a public opinion. Of course, this is an idealisation, excluding large parts of unrepresented society (women, workers etc.), and already lost with the progress of mass media, entertainment and consumerism of the twentieth century. The public sphere albeit remained – not in Habermas' ideal form of a critical discourse but as the place where private individuals gain and exchange information and interact with each other as well as corporate business and non-business entities. Adrienne Russell et al. currently see the boundaries between public and private blurring for the same reasons as those between the producer and the consumer: 'Combined with low-cost authoring tools, pervasive digital networks have lowered the threshold for producing, publishing, and disseminating knowledge and culture.' (2008, 43) The smartphone's ease of use, pervasiveness and networking capacity encourage elements of personal culture like casual communication, photographs, home movies or ultrashorts to disseminate into the public. It is a dedicated means to stay in touch, and whereas the attraction of gigantic screens lies in the monumental quality of the images, the small screens of smartphones convey a sense of closeness further enhanced by the usual need

to touch the screen.⁶ The omnipresent mobile media shape the concepts and practices of intimacy 'as no longer a "private" activity but a pivotal component of public sphere performativity,' Larissa Hjorth and Sum Sum Lim claim, underlining the importance to link the analyses of both (2012, 478).

The distinction between the private or public and the development of intimacy is relevant for *Vine's* ultrashorts on two levels: first, the depicted content, the narrated lives are situated, perceived, performed and negotiated as somewhere in a spectrum of private and public. The protagonists in the three examples of Sanders' 'Narrating People's Lives' traverse public spaces but judging by their reactions, none of them expected an interaction with a stranger or hearing a story of their life that they would usually be the ones telling. Other ultrashorts by Thomas Sanders are set in private surroundings, a kitchen for example. His concept does not discern between private or public spaces, he acts the same and anchors the clips. Interestingly the sense of an encounter's intimacy is not changed by the location either. The outdoor public spaces look more open and less harried than the indoor private ones. The investigative quality Sanders achieves through fast approaches and the narrating of things usually left unsaid, dominates the perception of space. While the whole appearance is one of intimate encounters, these are contrasted by the overemphasised narrators voice and the fact that the narration is fictional, therefore pretending a one-sided intimate knowledge of the omniscient, third-person narrator that boils down to a performance of (his) self through others.

Secondly, the ensuing social and para-social interactions within *Vine* also constitute experiences of intimacy and closeness. Even though the term 'intimate relationship' is often used as a euphemism for a sexual relationship, intimacy has a far wider and slightly unspecific spectrum. Debra J. Mashek and Arthur P. Aron summarize in their handbook (2013) manifold theoretical positions on intimacy and closeness. They distil two basic commonalities of the collected concepts: intimacy involves the self and is not a passive state but achieved through an interaction led process: 'Closeness and intimacy build over time as a function of selves interacting, which creates prototypical knowledge of specific patterns of relating to others, the inclusion of others in the self, opportunities to engage with others in a positive, self-revealing way that creates shared understanding, and the possibility of feeling cared for, validated, and understood.' (Mashek and Aron 2013, 416-417) Lay people and relationship science's concepts of intimacy and closeness influence the social practices and their interpretations on *Vine*: Closeness is assumed to be indicated by the time invested and various activities conducted while relating to others. The 'density of interaction' (417) is therefore conveyed through the amount and diversity of interactions on *Vine* and other platforms. Liking, commenting, sharing or remaking of posted ultrashorts establish mutual attention, exchange and influence. As a tool for the development of a social relationship this

⁶ However, the smartphone may also assume a distancing quality. Susan Sontag wrote that the camera stays between tourists and the world they try to picture, because they are so busy taking photographs 'converting experience into an image, a souvenir' (1977, 7). The same may be said for camera phone use today.

instant feedback is invaluable and present in all described contributions to *Vine*. The ultrashorts of the NBA's channel may mostly appear not to depict intimate moments, but the social interactions they provoke can still have an intimate quality.

Ultrashorts on *Vine* may supply private or intimate content but more important is their offer of social and para-social interactions that insinuate closeness and intimacy although some partners in the exchange are mere personae and it takes place in the public sphere. One necessary foundation for this is the pervasiveness of mobile media and networks. It is complemented by the design of the *Vine* application, whose ultrashort key feature further lowers the threshold for production and sharing of audio-visual material, thus easily enabling performances of self and continuous interactions. The aesthetic decisions made for the design of *Vine's* application as well as for the user generated ultrashort content, guide and limit the perception. Since the intended messages have to be fitted into a six second slot, the user depends on their own extension of the sometimes barely implied narrations and the serialisation of the ultrashort form, to allow for more complex concepts. The individual perceptions of, reactions to and interactions with ultrashorts on *Vine* vary greatly, depending on knowledge, experience and the uses and gratifications wished to achieve. Users inclined to approach *Vine* as a possibility for intimate interpersonal communication may find this, irrespective of the actual audio-visual content or the channel viewed, just by interacting. If the users don't actively participate, *Vine* is offering something with a literally more personal touch – tapping on the screen of the smartphone to select channels or playlists – but after all not so different from one predecessor: TV.

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