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YouTube

YouTube is an online social community whose sole purpose is the sharing of video clips. People can upload videos, as well as view and comment on those that others have posted. Some videos are professional productions, but many are amateur attempts at exhibitionism, complying with the site's motto "Broadcast Yourself." YouTube, created in 2005, swept the nation by storm, becoming so successful that computer giant Microsoft purchased the site before it celebrated its first year of operation. I have not spent much time on YouTube; however, recent events led me to explore these previously unexplored video waters in search of some purposeful nugget, a possible redeeming quality to what I had considered a complete waste of time. Admittedly, the majority of YouTube's waters remain uncharted, but some of what I found surprised me. In addition to random pointlessness, YouTube can also be nostalgic, informative, and educational, but the useful information must be gleaned with care, or else a person may be assaulted by strangely disturbing images.

The music of the Bee Gees had not crossed my mind in years until I entered YouTube's realm and saw them lip-synching "How Deep Is Your Love" in a featured clip. Watching them made me wonder about other music groups from my youth, and I was soon watching Billy Joel sing "Piano Man," followed by Weird Al Yankovic singing "Like a Surgeon." Quickly morphing back over twenty years, I searched for Manhattan Transfer and enjoyed "Java Jive," "Birdland," "Operator," and "Twilight Zone," all of which I sang with the jazz choir in high

school. Those were fun performances, and the videos were a short trip back to youthful innocence.

The educational community has taken notice of the YouTube phenomenon and is seeking to put it to use. Many teachers recognize the educational value of YouTube and other video-sharing sites, not only for content already available, but also as an avenue for students to create their own productions for specific assignments. A YouTube search on “photosynthesis” yielded some wonderful explanatory videos describing the process, and many had nice animations to aid understanding. Some of the clips I viewed had been created by science students as class projects. What a wonderfully powerful way to teach real-life skills such as organizational ability, public speaking, video editing, and visual presentations! On the other hand, I saw some videos that contained “photosynthesis” somewhere in their title or description but had absolutely nothing to do with the energy generating system in plants. As I continued the science theme, a search of “mitochondria” provided few clips that were applicable to science, but several more featured some strangely named music group and one extremely disturbing video that had nothing whatsoever to do with the cellular organelle named mitochondria.

History students, with the proper search, can watch John F. Kennedy’s inauguration, speeches, and assassination. They can watch Martin Luther King give his “I Have a Dream” speech and then go on to watch documentaries about Civil Disobedience or Black History in America or interviews and speeches by Malcolm X. “Ronald Reagan Presidency” yields videos of his inaugural speeches, destruction of the Berlin Wall, assassination attempts, and the President’s tribute to the astronauts that lost their lives when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded.

Although there are educational and informative pieces posted on YouTube, the domain is

not well regulated, and viewers can be caught unaware by a seemingly innocent search. Due to the abundance of the non-educational material and due to Internet safety concerns, many schools have decided to block YouTube, regardless of the educational potential. Consequently, some teachers have found a partial solution by locating educational content at home, saving it to a storage medium, and then showing the isolated clip in class. This is a short-term solution that allows for viewing pieces to learn concepts or skills or to witness some wonderful historic moments. The videos supplement textbooks and lectures without students having to maneuver through the deluge of silly, inappropriate, and myopic exhibitionism.

Having explored with slightly less bias, I acknowledge that YouTube is not the entirely worthless entity I previously assumed. Viewing online video can be reminiscent of days gone by, or it can aid learning and be an educational tool. However, many tools have sharp edges, and the unfiltered, unmoderated nature of the site should caution educators and parents regarding unlimited access by students and children. I can see myself accessing YouTube in the future for limited, specific searches. Even so, for unadulterated escapism, I prefer the limited scope and total control of Nintendo.