

the aimlessness and devaluing of authority on YouTube, but still want it in their education, even as any student would say, in a heartbeat, that they wish school was less boring, more fun, more *entertaining*? A rigorous, controlled, contained, rational argument is key to learning; not the flow, but the building of knowledge. Meanwhile, ease of acquisition, while comforting, and perhaps numbing, to my mind can never meet the sheer joy of a challenge, and the prize of the steady, often communal and hard work of creating new knowledge together.

MEDIA MASTERS AND GRASSROOT ART 2.0 ON YOUTUBE

BIRGIT RICHARD¹

Communication in the Web 2.0 context mainly works through images. The online video platform YouTube uses this form of visual communication and makes art forms of Western societies visible through their online videos. YouTube, as cultural reservoir and visual archive of moving images, accommodates the whole range of visualising creative processes – from artistic finger exercises to fine arts. A general characteristic of YouTube is the publishing of small everyday gestures of the ‘big ones’ (politicians, stars), like small incidents and their clumsiness in everyday actions, e.g. Beyoncé’s fall from the stage or Tom Cruise’s demonic pro-scientology interview. Through their viral distribution on different platforms, these incidents will never be covered up or disappear from the public view. At the same time big gestures and star images are replicated and sometimes reinterpreted by the ‘small people’ who present themselves in the poses and attitudes of the stars. Generally, a coexistence of different perspectives is possible. YouTube allows polysemic and polyvalent views on the everyday and media phenomena.

This article relies on YouTube research² that started in 2006 at the New Media Department of the Goethe University of Frankfurt. The results of the research have already presented representative forms and basic patterns, that is to say, categories for the clips appearing here. These kinds of clips, recurring in the observation period, have an impact on the basic representation of art or artistic expression within moving images on this platform. Methodologically the focus leads to the investigation (which has to be adequate to the specifics of the medium, or ‘media adequate’) of new visual structures and forms which can create – consciously or unconsciously – an art form. After focusing on the media structures, it will be discussed whether any and, if so, which ‘authentic’ new forms were developed solely on YouTube and whether these forms are innovative and can be characterised as avant-garde.

This article first takes a small step in evaluating how to get from a general communication through means of visibility in web 2.0, an often endless chatty cheesy visual noise³ – to the special quality of a consciously created aesthetic. From where do innovative aesthetic forms

-
1. This paper was translated with the support of Jan Grünwald and Marcus Recht.
 2. *Youtube Favourites: Ego and Art Clips*. Goethe University, Frankfurt 2006. See <http://www.birgitrichard.de>
 3. ‘Das Internet verkommt zu einem Debattierclub von Anonymen, Ahnungslosen und Denunzianten. Ein Plädoyer für eine Wissensgesellschaft mit Verantwortung’, Bernd Graff, ‘Die neuen Idiotae: Web 0.0’, *Sueddeutsche Online*, September 2007, www.sueddeutsche.de/computer/artikel/211/146869

emerge, related to their media structures? ⁴ Are they the products of 'media amateurs' ⁵ or do we have to find new specifications and descriptions for the producers? The definition of a 'media amateur' describes technically interested private individuals who acquire and develop technology before commercial use of the technology is even recognisable. Just as artists are developing their own techniques, according to Dieter Daniels, media amateurs are autodidacts who invent techniques, rather than just acquire knowledge about them (see for example the demo scene, the machinima, brickfilm producers as well as many areas of computer gaming in general ⁶). The media amateur directly intervenes in the production processes of the medium and does not just simply use the medium. What is fascinating is the media amateur's process of self education – not the result – and the direct impact on the internal structure and the control of the medium. ⁷ Media amateurs open a previously culturally unformed space of experience. This only partially applies to most of the YouTube clips in the realms of the visual arts; it is here most important to look at the visual content.

This article discusses all these concepts and introduces new descriptions for the different forms of production: the technically oriented media master, the do-it-yourselfer, the tinkerer, the amateur handicraftsman and the inventor. It outlines a basic research project on 'visual media culture' (a triangulation of research on media structure and iconography) of the presented online video platform. It is a product of the analysis of clips focusing on the media structure, analyzing the creative handling of images and the deviations and differences of pre-set media formats and stereotypes.

YouTube Basics

YouTube has been online since December 15th, 2005 and is owned by Google since 2006. The first video was uploaded December 22nd in 2005 and featured a cat called Pajamas. In the meantime, many other video hosting sites have emerged – Myspace, Google Video, revvr, MyVideo (Pro7, Sat 1), clipfish (RTL), VideoEgg, Sevenload (Burda) – which emulate the successful model. The platform is a typical occurrence of the second dialogic ⁸ era of the Internet, the so-called 'Web 2.0'. Here the users judge (through social networking and social bookmarking) the products of other participants by marking their favourites and writing comments. They respond to a video clip visually or provide a ranking.

There are different methods to search the content of YouTube. The most important one is searching by tags (keywords). Other criteria of choice: the 'Most Viewed' pages on the website show which clips were viewed by the most recipients (the same day, week, month, year,

4. See also Wolfgang Ernst, 'Plädoyer für eine Ästhetik der Datenbanken' (Lafitau, Humboldt, dBase). Forthcoming in: Wolfgang Schäffner and Irina Podgorny (eds) *Kolumbus der Datenräume*, forthcoming, 2008.

5. Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung*. München: Beck Verlag: 2002.

6. Ingo Linde, *Medienaneignung und Medienamateure am Beispiel der sogenannten Demoszene*, 2005. <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~wehn/anima/theory/demoszene/aneignung/index.htm>

7. Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung*. München: Beck Verlag: 2002, p. 210.

8. Vilém Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, Göttingen: European Photography, 1990. (3rd edition),

or in all time). 'Top Rated' are the clips valued most highly by the users, 'Most Discussed' are the clips with the most comments and, finally, 'Most Responded' shows the clips that got the most video responses.

Additionally, the following basic assumptions are essential for understanding the medium under discussion: there is no 'life of the other' represented on YouTube. The myth of 'authentic images' simply ignores the presence of a medium with its unique specifications for pre-formatting the content. Furthermore YouTube is no archive of the aesthetics of the trivial in the early 21st century. ⁹ It most definitely does *not* represent an image of an 'authentic' social 'reality'. YouTube is the prime example of the ingenious hybrid of foreign and 'self-owned' images. The very idea of one's own image is a construct of the social sciences: it does not exist. If there is such an entity it is the result of a conscious, artistically motivated act.

The misleading 'ideology of authenticity' as a cultural consensus is based on the poor quality of the recording tools with their low resolution, as well as the presentation in small windows on the computer screen, which conspire to create 'a look of everyday life'. This effect implicates the intriguing promise of authenticity based on the photo-realistic principle (cf. Richter's term, 'realistic styles'), which is still valid for the moving images of online video. But this discussion is of less relevance with regard to the unique art forms and techniques that are established by amateurs and professionals. Also people with no professional education in the field of art production are testing new forms in this laboratory for moving images, which they generate from materials of everyday media and pop culture. All producers always act within the frame of their aesthetic socialisation.

It has to be figured out if there is a new kind of creativity at work, and in what way it is new. It is of importance to differentiate between the 'artistic' acrobatics of the variété/circus and new art forms and their prototypes, even though contexts generally are afloat. Already established terms and definitions should be discussed and new categories attached, which describe this form of creativity within a new medium. Definitions, like 'Geniale Dilettanten' (amateur genius), prosumer, emancipated consumers or media amateur have too many negative connotations. In concentrating on the product and work, more differentiated terms must be found for the unique creative outputs. Possible suggestions for new terms might be 'art amateur' or perhaps 'media master', because the clip examples imply high media competence and artistic association with the medium and its possibilities, while still not being located within the field of accepted/ high arts. Furthermore the clips that appear notably artistic are often produced by 'young design professionals' who generate the so-called hybrid pop picture. The focus of this article is on the development of a method for the analysis of the visual output and the aesthetic quality of a media structure based young creativity.

9. Bernd Graff, 'Kamerafahrten durch die globale Privatsphäre', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 2006, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/artikel/802/77725>

YouTube-Research: evaluation methods and clip categories

The examination of YouTube¹⁰ makes it necessary to sketch a method of evaluation and classification, which is adequate for this special social-aesthetic online phenomenon. Lacking interpretative neutral methods, a mimetic¹¹ form of scientific research is to be aspired towards, in which the examiners are adjusting to the field, and at the same time developing empirically founded knowledge on the specific cultural system. It is a challenge to obtain basic patterns of artistic representation, but they can be categorised with help of the current research project on YouTube and its derivation of categories which remain stable, even though content constantly changes. This opens up the possibility of refining a typology of representational patterns and conventions. For this goal a double approach seems to be promising: to proceed on the one hand by means of a representative evaluation, which gives an idea of the quantity of a certain type of video; and on the other hand on behalf of a qualitative evaluation by means of selected case studies, e.g. the concept of 'key-images' (in German 'Schüsselbilder') and 'relational image-clusters'.¹²

A degree-model, developed for the examination of the visual universe of Web 2.0, shows the state of the art in research in the following steps:

1. Denomination of the most important tags: it is to be noted, that this happens within the adaptation of the arbitrary classification of tags by other users (pictures should be found by other users).
2. Parallel evaluation of material across three search modalities: Firstly through one or several tags (several are more specific, but limit the number of results – some clips are not found). The automated search concentrates on the titles of the clips and the user-given tags. Secondly on a basis of random checks and within an associative selection or a mind map, e.g. terms, which lie in the associated focus; a form of search, which originates in the flow of surfing and researching YouTube, as an associative search of synonyms within the content of reference. This also involves registering the variations of the same user (as author/artist) or related videos (a connection automatically generated by software). And thirdly, through social bookmarking by way of looking at users' favourites, following users' recommendations and their discussions of videos. Here all videos on the topic must be reviewed with focus on the visual content. The same procedure is necessary for groups based around a specific topic, within these groups it is not possible to search with the help of tags.
3. Investigation of the tags on behalf of a selection by topic in the retrieved material.

10. As well as the photography community Flickr, see Richard, Grünwald and Ruhl. 'Me, Myself, I: Schönheit der Gewöhnlichen. Eine Studie zu den fluiden ikonischen Kommunikationswelten bei flickr.com' in Kaspar Maase (ed.), *Die Schönheiten des Populären. Zur Ästhetik der Massenkünste*, Frankfurt: 2008.

11. Amann and Hirschauer. 'Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm', in Hirschauer and Amann (eds) *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*, Frankfurt am Main: 1997, p.20.

12. The term 'relational image-clusters' was introduced by Richard and Zaremba, *Hülle und Container, Medizinische Weiblichkeitsbilder im Internet*, München: 2007.

The search with tags should lead, step by step, through condensation of the clip material to the specific case analysis.

4. Selecting the representative clips first according to the frequency of their occurrence and by viewing the content too, sorting them into groups. The selection and analysis of clips lead to the emergence of representative clusters.
5. Choice and creation of the key-images of the selected prototypical clips for the analysis.
6. The construction of a clip-typology based on imagery and the search for divergences from the aesthetic average/stereotypes of the platform, looking for a special artistic quality, taking into account the possibilities of the representation and structure of Web 2.0.
7. Creation of related image clusters following the analysis of the specific nature of images. The concluding statements about the basic patterns in the artistic representation are made at first according to the frequency of their occurrence and then in the next step by analyzing the clips in case studies.

Until now there has not been a lot of specific research on YouTube¹³. The analysis of the YouTube clips is now carried out within the scope of 'visual media culture', which acknowledges the specific quality of a 'shifting image' which creates image clusters and produces new relations and references between images permanently. The following clip categories, which were developed within the focus of the Frankfurt Visual Media Culture Research, grasp and extract the basic structures of the platform. The clip categories are fluent and to be classified into several levels; there are always connections between the categories. The superior category is 'response', a visual answer to a posted clip. Response is analogous to the 'cover version' synonymous concepts from other contexts as the 'cover version', a concept from the musical field with the purpose of a version coming close to the original; the 'remake', a concept related to movies, which already implies interpretations of the original; the concept of 'parody', which ridicules the original; the 'remix', a musical concept in which it is essential to transform the original, and the so-called 're-enactment', originally a concept of recreating a historical event or social environments. Within YouTube the concept is now used for, among others, re-enacting movies, game scenes or art performances without the claim of closeness to the original.

The 'media-remix clips' form a very big group, which operates with found footage, originating in the sectors of television, movies (a special form is the 5-second-movie, in which the movie is reduced to its very essentials or films like *Saw* are re-enacted with puppets in sixty seconds), games, cartoons, advertisement (viral marketing) and the huge sector of music videos. In this section the transformations of 'found footage' occupy an immense space and consist of the editing, rearrangement or fragmentation through personal selection of the media material; in addition written text is integrated or the sound is changed, e.g. by using different music, or combining the material with other found footage.

The biggest content category is occupied by the 'ego clips'. They excessively serve the narciss-

13. Note, however, (except see <http://creativitymachine.net/2007/06/15/YouTube-research-gazette/> and the European Videovortex conference under <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/videovortex/>).

sistic self representation of the users. In this category a wide range from shy monologues to visual self-prostitution are to be found. Because of the diversity of the self-representational field, subcategories emerge like dancing, singing, karaoke, sports and vlogs (video-weblogs). These mainstream forms of self representation have their origin in television program formats reminiscent of casting shows, with limited ways of expressing oneself. This category is not about subversion, more about a nature of self advertisement and self design: following a dream of being famous and to be discovered by the community or even better for the movies or television¹⁴. YouTube shows many productions which were formerly made for parental eyes only: now the child sings and dances for a global audience.

'Fan clips' show the enthusiasm of users for a certain star or a band; they spread hymns and honor their idols (e.g. the band Tokio Hotel). The contrary sentiment is represented by 'hater clips' polemicising against a band (e.g. they express disgust towards singer Amy Winehouse or Tokio Hotel, especially with relation to their deviation of gender clichés) or of those who insult others on account of their video. Hate/diss/flamewar-clips are response clips that serve only to massively insult others.

The 'docuclip' or 'event clip' shows events as well as accidents out of the perspective of the eyewitness (for example footage of the sinking ferry off Santorin in 2007); therefore they also belong to the category of 'random clips'. Personal highlights, like concerts or festivals, also count as docuclips or event clips. 'Funclips' are of a more widespread category since they often show the misfortune of other people. In general a large number of clips are posted to make other users laugh. A special form is the so-called 'mockumentary' clip which appears to be of serious nature at first sight, but then displays itself as a parody. A subcategory of the fun clip is the 'tutorial clip' that is produced with the formality of school television, however, on account of the overdone seriousness, has a humorous effect.

Another section presents itself in the category of the 'experiment clip' or 'transform-clip', in which users show their personal unusual utilization or experiments with everyday objects. They alter things like laser pointers, combine Mentos and Diet Coke resulting in an explosion, show their hacks applied on an iPhone (jailbreaking) or demonstrate lockpicking skills; the last kind of clip is designated by users as a 'MacGyver-clip'. Here the whole range of harmless manipulation up to unlawful operations becomes visible, through which the users show that they are in control of their everyday objects.

'Skillclips' enable the users of the platforms to demonstrate individual abilities for which there is usually no audience or contest: Head-banging, human beat boxing and finger snipping like a virtuoso, every personal talent can be exposed here. Skillzclips are a very special form of the egoclip, because of the focus on self-representation. They however deserve their own category, because they show unusual talents which do not fit in the group of 'art clip' or 'artyclip'.

The category 'artyclip' contains videos that demonstrate special abilities of arts and crafts. It

includes the category 'art response', in which users transform the works of established artists of high art, e.g. Erwin Wurms' *One Minute Sculpture*. The arty/ artresponse categorization includes the recording of performances, in which case it belongs to the category 'mediaremix', films of an exhibition or the documentation of an artist's life and work or artistic works as 'found footage'.

The final and most important category of online video is designated 'art clips', in line with the topic of this article. These clips establish a new media-adequate form, which then could occasionally appear in the global context of art. A new creative appearance of art with limited circulation is the category of 'misheard lyrics', with its prototype the song 'Wishmaster' by Nightwish as the centre for response videos,¹⁵ Misheard lyrics are a 'deficiency' from everyday life, like misunderstanding lyrics in a foreign language, which then develops into a new art form. The misunderstood words appear in a typographic re-interpreted form and are brought together within visual representations in the shape of a simple collage. This category requires a profound sensibility for music, the sound of language and the ironic quality of images selected. Another new artistic form is the so-called 'shred' genre (e.g. Lischka 2008: in music videos a Finnish guitarist replaces the original audio track by badly played guitar-soli of famous guitarists, like Carlos Santana).

The next step in the analysis is to find out in which of the developed categories art is to be discovered. We suspect that videos with artistic aesthetics may be found in the following categories: mediaremix, fan clips, arty/artresponse and in ego clips.

Emergent art in web 2.0.

Firstly, the main tags, their synonyms and their occurrence (at the moment of analyzing process, date of login: 5/2008) are picked out and collected. The tag 'art' (947,000 search results) and the German tag for art 'Kunst' (15,800 search results) are used mainly. Looking at 'Kunst' first, often a direct connection to art is not given. There are band names containing the word Kunst (e.g. Markscheider Kunst) as well as titles from television series and sequels (e.g. the episode of *Sailor Moon*: 'Brotlose Kunst'). The term 'Kunst' appears in languages like Dutch and Swedish, making it harder to isolate the interesting clips. Altogether not many clips can be found that are directly derived from classical fine arts or put themselves in this tradition. If there is a direct relation to art, then it is in the form of a secondary presentation about art, such as television documentaries, or of the documentation of a performance or work ('arty clips' or 'artresponse clips'). The clip itself is not seen as a piece of art.

It can be concluded that searching for the tag 'Kunst', clips about art can be found, but no clips that define themselves as art or are artistic. The tag 'art' mostly brings up clips that deal with art, show art exhibitions, but are seldom art in the classical sense of fine arts. Street art can be found in various ways of presentation, e.g. showing the development of a graffiti in fast motion ('1 Week of Art Works'). Then there are a large group of clips concentrating on peripheral arts and craft phenomena with a highly entertaining factor just through the uniqueness of their production: e.g. plaster-painting, arty cookery, nail art, speed art, sand art (sand is

14. See Matthias Horx, 'Die Me-Volution', *CICERO Magazin für politische Kultur*, December 2007, <http://www.horx.com/Medien-Highlights.aspx>

15. The clip is available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg5_mIQOsUQ

sprinkled on an overhead projector and a constantly changing picture is generated) and latte art (the milk foam on top of a coffee is used creatively). Another creative phenomenon is 'spit art' (the artist drips water out of his mouth on the street and creates a picture that way), as well the clip 'Bruce Lee – High Speed Painting' in which the painter dips his hands into paint to create the portrait of Bruce Lee, by hitting the canvas with the edge of his colored hands.

The 'search related to: art' button shows alternative tags given by the recipients to specify their supposed field of art: e.g. 'spray art' or 'Japanese art'. All these categories are to file under 'arty clip' or 'skillz clip'. Like in all these YouTube contextual categories, clips from bands that have the word 'art' in their name or in a song title can be found as well.

Next, the contextualization of the clips into media categories is necessary, focusing on the most visible sorts of clips within the tags 'Kunst' and 'art'. Seventy per cent of the found material can be described as self made and self defined forms of art. Twenty-five per cent are connected to everyday media culture, like music videos, computer games. Maybe five per cent of clips present new forms of online video art. It is also interesting that none of the categories under which the clips on YouTube are filed contains the term 'art'. Therefore the category 'Film & Animation' is mostly chosen to categorise the clip (however, terms such as 'Comedy' or 'Music' also appear).

New forms of artistic expression on YouTube can definitely not be found through tags, so another way of locating the clips to get the desired results has to be figured out. The varieties of artistic production on YouTube are not yet limited here by the 'system of art', or by the commercially orientated art market. Many alternative forms are visible on YouTube and they are potentially easier accessible through the Internet without entering the bourgeois realm of museums and art galleries. Most of the artistic manifestations happen here outside the system of art and are often marginal forms of art, like 'street art' (even though the term 'street art' is now a common phenomenon within the art scene, e.g. looking at the success of the artist Banksy). Here also the rehabilitation of marginalised (maybe so-called folk?) art is put in the foreground. Most of the clips are not relatable to the common concept of fine arts. Forgotten forms of media art get contemporary refreshment in the new clip categories, like stop motion and animation. In YouTube art happens without the burden of academic education and the judgment of professional art critiques of media/art history that work hand in hand in the art market system. YouTube clips do not need museums and galleries: they simply emerge through creative acts in a flow of communication that is one of the messages out of this online video universe.

Online video: media art masters?

In the following discussion, we look at the context of production, meaning the embedding of clips in the media system, which exists parallel to the operating system of art. Firstly, Web 2.0 is a natural host for this kind of art. The contemporary artistic forms differ strongly from artistic initiatives of Net art in the middle of the 1990s. For instance the 'P2P Net Art Project' only had an internal vector of distribution. Their art films spread via file sharing and were then modified. The artist gives the first impulse and the modified art circulates within the defined network. The source material is destroyed. All these conditions are described artistically, and are not

comparable to practices of everyday file sharing of normal users. The artistic concept of the project 'P2P Art – The Aesthetics of Ephemerality' defines the development of the action. Limiting conditions are artificially set up, they do not exist that way by virtue of the medium itself.

Keeping in mind the net art debate of the mid-nineties, the following questions can be asked: Can the creative and artistic clips on YouTube be described as a 'net art 2.0' that works within the given structures of the Net? Or is it art on the Internet, having art as content? Both forms can be found on YouTube. For art within the net the clip-category that fits here perfectly is the 'art clip'; for the second one, art on the Net, the category 'arty clip' or 'artresponse clip' is the suitable one.

Secondly, the term 'media-amateur' should be reconsidered for the producers of this kind of online video art, and maybe paraphrased into 'media-master' (in the sense of master craftsman): the media-master is characterised through technical expertise and perfection, and has special skills relating to the medium and its structure. Artistic masterpieces are created, which may count as media design or applied arts. Seen from the point of view of the art system of fine arts, the amateur normally represents the infantile, naïve and unreflected, almost too perfect imagery, that is generated through visual stereotypes or motifs of popular culture. Seen from the system of fine arts, the amateurish visual mostly refers to certain ways of representation that are not part of classical set of the arts. Parallels to terms like 'proam' and 'prosumer' can be seen: new hybrid forms of production and reception – a 'procipient' may emerge. Most YouTube-uploaders do not intend to establish or implement a new art form or aesthetic. YouTube-artists are not generated by the art market, but they develop their ideas within the community. Clips of typical media-amateurs mostly document their own abilities, here classified as 'skillzclip' (like the dance phenomenon 'jumpstyle'). The skills presented are enjoyed by the producers and their friends in the act of narcissistic mirroring the ego.

Global communities use YouTube for communication – the clips serve as a fluid communication-lubricant. The system of art is not of importance to them. These new forms are often commercially used (the ultimate owner of the rights is Google!) mostly by the other side of 'art professionals': applied arts, design and advertising. The communication with the help of these moving images does not necessarily generate art – just as knowledge is not necessarily created on Wikipedia. Often contributions lead to phenomena described as 'knowledge of opinions' or 'search-engine-knowledge'. Every issue produces its own importance. Sometimes even 'irresponsible' knowledge¹⁶ is generated, especially when free information prevails over quality. Accordingly, maybe there is also an 'art of opinions' (only through the quantity of rating) and 'search-engine-art': the café latte art could be one example.

Positively interpreted, YouTube is first of all characterised by simultaneous, instant production and visual reactions in real-time and the resources for the user's own creative outputs. A clip characterised as artistic will not necessarily be successful on the art market or create a new category of art within this context (like machinima), but potentially it could arrive on

16. Bernd Graff, 'Die neuen Idiotae: Web 0.0'.

the market of moving images. Within the context of media art festivals it could be discovered, that the artists themselves use YouTube clips like a VJ (e.g. the artist Björn Melhus for the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück in 2007). New forms of visual communication are not only generated, but also new forms of presentation as well.

Also, YouTube presents itself as a forum for all forms of re-enactment and accommodates bodydoubles of almost all imaginable stars. There are also revivals of discarded and partly forgotten art forms, like the photo film, as well as revivals of analogue techniques like stop motion or low-tech art-forms like super 8mm with slomo-effects. Besides that the users of YouTube are very up to date with their forms of production, because on a very small scale they also work with hybrid forms of moving images, which appear to have been produced for contemporary cinema.

In what way may the modality of this media based image-production be describable with respect for the categories? Apart from the function of self representation, it always contributes to the communication of the individual within its community. The moving images are the profound base of 'social software' and serve interaction and the sharing of data with other users. The transfer of categories of participation by H.D. Huber from Net art to YouTube shows the participatory character of the platform. It opens up possibilities for users to shape the appearance of a particular project via download, editing, and through inserting text, pictures, audio or found footage. Relating to the Web 2.0 this means that the clips, although as raw material they may be reactive, the user just clicks to play them, which does not result in them being necessarily interactive. But they function as an active inspiration for users to produce their own responses and participate. The result is a comprehensive non-hierarchic rhizomatic online video project (such as is the case with the misheard lyrics project, for which the core and starting point is Nightwish's 'Wishmaster'), which is cross-linked on different levels and changes constantly. An associative online video map emerges. The main focus has moved from the term of interaction to communication and creative participation by the means of moving images in social networks.

Most YouTube users stay within the given media structures. They do not program, yet still new aesthetics emerge and what is most important the users act one hundred percent media literate! YouTube clips would never be a substitution or be an exchange for classic media art, but they are a supplement, a marginal but important fresh addition and revitalisation of art, in parallel to the Web 2.0 blogs' supplementation of journalism. The thus far invisible common creative practices – a lot of them may have existed before – are becoming more visible and open up the possibility of emerging new art forms. A media adequate 'grassroot art' emerges, which affiliates Ullrich's approach¹⁷ of a largely entertaining art, and transforms it into 'l'art pour l'ego et les amis'.

17. Wolfgang Ullrich, *Was war Kunst? Biografien eines Begriffs*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2005.

REFERENCES

- Concerning the Web 2.0 and YouTube Research in general, basic materials for this article are coming out of the research out of a Frankfurt research group (Dr. Jutta Zaremba, Jan Grünwald, Marcus Recht, Dr. Alexander Ruhl and Harry Wolff).*
- Amann, Klaus and Hirschauer, Stefan. 'Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm', in S. Hirschauer and K. Amann (eds.) *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*, Frankfurt am Main: 1997, p. 7-52.
- Baumgärtel, Tilmann. *Innovative Amateure an den Schnittstellen von Kunst und Medien. Ein Email-Dialog mit dem Kunsthistoriker Dieter Daniels über sein Buch 'Kunst als Sendung'*, Telepolis (2003). <http://www.heise.de/tp/r4/artikel/13/13975/1.html>
- Daniels, Dieter. *Kunst als Sendung. Von der Telegrafie zum Internet*, München: 2002.
- Ernst, Wolfgang. 'Plädoyer für eine Ästhetik der Datenbanken' (Lafitau, Humboldt, dBase), in Wolfgang Schäffner and Irina Podgorny (eds) *Kolumbus der Datenräume*, forthcoming 2008.
- Flusser, Vilém. *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, Göttingen: 3rd ed. 1990.
- Gérald, Julia. 'Art 2.0: Wenn das Web 2.0 Künstler inspiriert', *Ein Überblick über künstlerische und partizipative Initiativen*, November 2007. http://www.culture-buzz.de/art_2.0_wenn_das_web_2.0_kunstler_inspiziert_article241.html
- Graff, Bernd. *Kamerafahrten durch die globale Privatsphäre*, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 10/11 (June 2006), also available: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/artikel/802/77725/>
- Graff, Bernd. 'Die neuen Idiotae. Web 0.0. Das Internet verkommt zu einem Debattierclub von Anonymen, Ahnungslosen und Denunzianten. Ein Plädoyer für eine Wissensgesellschaft mit Verantwortung', *Sueddeutsche Online*, September 2007, www.sueddeutsche.de/computer/artikel/211/146869/print.html.
- Horx, Matthias. 'Die Me-Volution', *CICERO Magazin für politische Kultur*, (December 2007). <http://www.horx.com/Medien-Highlights.aspx>.
- Huber, Hans-Dieter. *Zur Geschichte der Netz.Kunst. Problemstellungen, Stand der Dinge, Ausblicke*, 2001. <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/artnine/netzkunst/geschichte>.
- JelleVanDun. *My Animated World*, 2006. <http://de.youtube.com/watch?v=cYhhfHYa5s>.
- Kino ARSENAL Berlin, Fotofilm, 2006. <http://www.fdk-berlin.de/en/arsenal/programmtext-anzeige/archive/2006/11/article/688/212.html?cHash=6574331346>.
- Linde, Ingo. 'Medienaneignung und Medienamateure am Beispiel der sogenannten Demoszene', 2005, <http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~wehn/animatheory/demoszene/aneignung/index.htm>.
- Lischka, Konrad. 'Medienkünstler verhöhnt Gitarreniganten – und fliegt bei YouTube raus', *der Spiegel* 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/0,1518,535974,00.html>.
- N.N. 'Die Welt im Spiegel der Videobotschaften', *NZZ-Online* 28 July 2006, www.nzz.ch/2006/07/28/em/articleEC155.html.
- Richard, Birgit. *Sheroes: Genderspiele im virtuellen Raum*, Bielefeld: 2005.
- . 'Open Corpse und der Tod aus der (You)Tube. Zur Ästhetik des geöffneten, 'transi'-(torischen) und anatomischen Körpers in Musikvideo, Computerspiel und Internet' in Andreas Frewer, Annette Hilt, and Isabella Jordan (eds) *Endlichkeit, Medizin und Unsterblichkeit*, will be released end 2008.
- Richard, Birgit and Grünwald, Jan and Ruhl, Alexander. 'Me, Myself, I: Schönheit der Gewöhnlichen. Eine Studie zu den fluiden ikonischen Kommunikationswelten bei flickr.com.' in Kaspar Maase (ed) *Die Schönheiten des Populären. Zur Ästhetik der Massenkünste*, Frankfurt: 2008.
- Richard, Birgit and Grünwald, Jan. 'Charles Manson tanzt auf den Achsen des Bösen im Web 2.0! Zur Re-Dramatisierung des Bösen in der digitalen medialen Alltagskultur', in Faulstich, Werner (ed) *Das Böse heute*, will be released at Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München: autumn 2008.
- Richard, Birgit and Zaremba, Jutta. *Hülle und Container. Medizinische Weiblichkeitsbilder im Internet*, München: 2007.
- Ullrich, Wolfgang. *Was war Kunst? Biografien eines Begriffs*, S. Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main 2005.

waverlyflams (YouTube username).

The Haunting, 2007. <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=tFRhs3-pP8w> and *spooky messages while cooking beans* <http://waverlyfilms.com> and on <http://www.mytv.de/view.html?id=290757>.

FLAGGING OR FAGGING (SELF-)CENSORSHIP OF GAY CONTENT ON YOUTUBE

MINKE KAMPMAN

Introduction

This article is a critical case study about the part of the YouTube community that misuses the flagging system to get videos and other users censored or banned because of gay content. ‘Censorship is the suppression of speech or deletion of communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful or sensitive, as determined by a censor.’¹ Because the censor in this case is (part of) the community that is being censored, you could speak of it as self-censorship.

After explaining how the flagging system works, how it got introduced and YouTube’s stand-point towards misuse, the article will elaborate on how this system is misused towards the LGBT² community. This will be followed by a discussion of their strategies and reactions towards this phenomenon, ending with a conclusion about the YouTube flagging system.

Introducing Video Flagging on YouTube

YouTube³ is an online platform where anyone can post videos. The feature of moderating video content by the use of video flagging was announced on August 11th, 2005⁴ on the company’s blog. Moderating other users is a feature that was announced in a blogpost⁵ on December 14th, 2005 where YouTube introduced the ability to block/report other users.

Video Flagging

Video flagging is one of the options given to users to react and respond to any video on YouTube. The other possibilities are: share it, favorite it, add to your playlist, comment on it either in text or with a video response, and rate it. None of these options, with the exception of ‘flagging’ and ‘commenting’, are moderated by the YouTube staff. In the beginning there were five reasons the user was asked to choose from when flagging a video. More than two years later⁶, these were changed into six categories (adding ‘spam’), containing 17 different

-
1. ‘Censorship.’ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved on May 18th, 2008. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship>
 2. LGBT stands for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender/Transsexual people’.
 3. YouTube was founded in February, 2005. It’s a subsidiary of Google, Inc. since November 2006. YouTube Company History, <http://www.youtube.com/t/about>
 4. YouTube Blog. Posted on Aug 11, 2005. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=XgM4c0oGu94>
 5. YouTube Blog. Posted on 15, 2005. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=MykmTeTiooA>
 6. YouTube Blog. ‘Improvements to Video Flagging System’ Nov 6, 2007. <http://www.youtube.com/blog?entry=vQjIMRCXDv4>