

Poetics of Early YouTube: Production, Performance, Success

Rainer Hillrichs



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Poetics of Early YouTube: Production, Performance, Success

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Preface and Acknowledgments

The e-book you are about to read is my dissertation – which I submitted in December 2014 and defended in July 2015 – with a few cuts, revisions, and updates, particularly in the coda dealing with YouTube and YouTube culture today.

The document has been formatted to be read on computer and tablet screens but also for printing. For computer reading I suggest to choose a view where two pages are shown side by side, or a single page view with the Table of Contents (Bookmarks) on the left. For printing I suggest to print two pages on one A4 page.

For me, the most important factor for choosing a mode of publication was that researchers all over the world should be able to read my dissertation – the work that I spent several years of my life researching, writing, and revising – with little effort and without paying a lot of money. Nevertheless, in academia there is still a lot of cultural capital invested in printed books. So I searched for publishers who offered combined open access e-book and commercial print publication. Yet even with comparatively innovative publishers there were major drawbacks, which I will not go into here. After assessing all options, I decided to publish an open access e-book with the library of my home university. Possibly, there will be a print edition another time.

I hope you enjoy reading this book. I certainly enjoyed writing it.

I am grateful to...

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Introduction

This study is an exploration of early YouTube culture. At the beginning of the project was the simple observation that videos were created and uploaded to YouTube, for example by the users running the channels BROOKERS, SMOSH, and MORBECK, who joined YouTube between September 2005 and March 2006 during the first 12 months of the service's operation. Nevertheless, in the YouTube research thus far, YouTube videos were rarely regarded and studied as audiovisual artifacts: as objects that were created by the use of audiovisual techniques to be seen by others. What was put in front of the camera? How was the camera used? How was the audiovisual footage worked on and put together? – Such questions did not feature prominently in the YouTube research. Commonly, YouTube users were not regarded as producers of videos at all but as “participants” on a “continuum of cultural participation” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 57). Their videos – those uploaded in the first couple of years of YouTube in particular – were seen as mere means of communication and social networking (see 1.1 The Research Field, pp. 17-19 in detail). This led to an overall approach of YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts in this project.

In this study I examine the most subscribed video blogs of the years 2005 and 2006 on YouTube with methods of film and media studies, audiovisual analysis in particular.¹ The aspects on which I focus are contributing users' backgrounds and motivations for using the service, video production, settings, functions of the body and modes of performance, the use of audiovisual techniques, kinds (or genres) of videos, the overall form of videos, and the activities of the contributing users and of others with regards to the videos once uploaded to YouTube.

I am going to show that creating and showing videos were endeavors of YouTube users from early on. Early video bloggers, who turned out to be successful on YouTube, pursued specific video projects employing their bodies and audiovisual techniques in a reflected, goal-oriented, and efficient manner. They were creators of audiovisual artifacts of various degrees of complexity and used the platform to publicly show them to viewers.

¹ For terminology see p. 46 and pp. 57-58.

Introduction

I argue that video blogging – the “emblematic” user practice during the first couple of years of the service’s operation which is typically regarded as a practice of communication and social networking (e.g. Burgess and Green 53-54; Harley and Fitzpatrick 681) – can also be seen as an audiovisual practice. Depending on other practices, conventions in all aspects in focus of this study emerged on YouTube in 2005 and 2006. The video blog can be seen as an audiovisual form with specific and recognizable traits that emerged in interplay with the practice.

It is necessary to break up the homogenizing ideas of participatory culture and social media, to closely attend to online services and their use, and to situate them with regards to specific phenomena of media history: Did YouTube really challenge the separation of production and consumption that was endemic of modern mass media? Are we really moving “forward into the age of mass digital cultural production,” as Michael Strangelove contends (185)? How is YouTube an extension, transformation, or break from other media in which audiovisual artifacts are shown? How does YouTube videomaking need to be situated with regards to other audiovisual practices? This study aims to offer insights in these regards.

1 Making Sense of a Mess

YOUTUBE IS A MESS (Juhasz, “Pre-Tour: YOUTUBE IS...,”
Learning from YouTube)

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Consensus: YouTube is different things to different people or different things all at once

The YouTube research is characterized by a consensus that YouTube is different things to different people or different things all at once, which is said to be true for users and uses, and for dimensions of the service YouTube itself (e.g. Lange, “(Mis)conceptions” 87; Burgess and Green, *YouTube* viii; Snickars and Vonderau 13).

YouTube is used for casual to obsessive uploading, viewing, rating, favoriting, commenting, subscribing, and ‘sharing’ of videos via Email or through postings on other websites (Burgess and Green 57). For all of these activities except for the viewing a YouTube user account is needed. Among the users who upload videos are individuals, organizations, small and big businesses (39). The videos uploaded by some users were made by themselves, the videos uploaded by others taken from third sources (41). Between these poles are practices like ‘mashing up’ audio and video material from different sources into a new work and selectively ‘quoting’ sections from movies and television programs (Lessig 68; Burgess and Green 49). Motivations for making and uploading videos vary, are often multiple, and may change over time (Lange 91). Videos uploaded to the platform can be classified into different kinds or “genres” (Burgess and Green 49; Strangelove 43). Users have various levels of expertise and may or may not be involved in the production of videos or other content for other outlets (Lange 91).

The acknowledgment of a multiplicity of kinds of users and uses is analog to an acknowledgment of a multiplicity of dimensions of the service YouTube itself. In their introduction to *The YouTube Reader*, Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau list several “YouTube metaphors:” YouTube can be understood as a “platform, [...] a library, an archive, a laboratory, [...] a medium like television,” or a “database” (13). For Jean Burgess and Joshua Green “YouTube is a commercial

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enterprise” but “also a platform designed to enable cultural participation by ordinary citizens” (75).

Nevertheless, among the consensus of multiplicity there are overall tendencies, dominant paradigms and frameworks, and several gaps, which I will outline here in order to situate and bolster the approach in the present study.

Focus on YouTube in its ‘contemporary’ state

Tracing YouTube’s home page or other YouTube pages at the Internet Archive gives an impression of continuities and changes of functionality and design since the service went online in April 2005 (see e.g. p. 36). Indeed, YouTube has a history. However, there are hardly any diachronic views on YouTube tracing changes of the platform or its use over time or perspectives that approach an earlier state of YouTube from a distance. YouTube was primarily studied when it was relatively new: Seminal YouTube research was published in 2007 (Lange), 2008 (Lovink and Niederer, eds.), and 2009 (Burgess and Green; Snickars and Vonderau, eds.; Buckingham and Willett, eds.). The focus shifted to Facebook (e.g. Lovink’s *Unlike Us* project, 2011), mobile media (e.g. Snickars and Vonderau’s *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, 2012), and ‘big data’ (e.g. Reichert, *Big Data*, 2014). In the papers of the *Video Vortex Reader* and *The YouTube Reader* dates between February and December 2005 are provided for the time YouTube went online (McDonald 388; Richard 142), which epitomizes the lack of interest in the history of YouTube.

Early YouTube culture is the focus of this study. Besides the unquestioned value of contemporary perspectives on contemporary media – first-hand accounts of early cinema would be the prime example – there is also value in perspectives taken from a historical distance, from a moment in time that is not the moment in view. Earlier arguments can be revised. Burgess and Green, for example, suggest that users who wanted to earn money with their videos only joined YouTube after a “grassroots” stage (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 91; see also van Dijck 115-116). The study of early contributing users’ backgrounds (chapter 2.1) and monetization of their videos (chapter 7.4) offers contrary evidence in this regard. Several dimensions of the platform and its use have not received a lot of attention thus far at all, that is, for any moment in YouTube history: Video production, the use

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of audiovisual techniques, and the overall form of videos, for example. Thus there is a need for further YouTube research, and maybe also a need for fresh engagements with the early years of the platform and the arguments made thus far.

Focus on videos that refer to works created within the established media industries

Frequently, videos that refer to works produced within the established media industries, for example to Hollywood movies, corporate network television programs, and popular music are mentioned or discussed in the research literature. Henry Jenkins, for instance, stresses the function of YouTube as a platform where “various fan communities, brand communities, and subcultures come together.” By quoting and reworking industry works, “amateur curators assess the value of commercial content and re-present it for various niche communities of consumers” (“Cultural Theory of YouTube” 94). Lawrence Lessig discusses the precarious copyright status of “remix” videos uploaded to YouTube (68). “Mashups” are an example of “produsage” on YouTube for Axel Bruns (238). Peters and Seier’s engagement with home dance videos in *The YouTube Reader* also deals with users’ appropriation of industry content.

David Buckingham criticizes this focus:

Jenkins’s focus is almost exclusively on the ways in which consumers rework existing, commercially produced media content – particularly through the activity of editing. Yet there is a significant difference between such fan productions and original productions in which people create their own content. This is not to imply that fan productions are somehow lacking in creativity or indeed that ‘original’ productions do not also depend on existing cultural forms and conventions. (“A Commonplace Art?” 43)

Ironically, Jenkins and Lessig in particular seem to be on the side of the user and not on that of corporate media; however, their advocacy ignores users’ original productions. Inadvertently, it reaffirms the cultural dominance of industry productions. Discussions of copyright are

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primarily concerned with the copyright of large rights holders – not of the creators of original or transformative works themselves.²

This study responds to the focus and its critique. The question if a YouTube video refers to other works is not a criterion for corpus formation. The focus is on successful users and only in a second step on the kinds of videos they uploaded, asking, for example, if highly inter-textual videos were common and to which kinds of other works they referred (see chapters 1.3, 2.3, and 4.2).

Participatory culture

Frequently, YouTube is made sense of by recourse to Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture. Defining the concept in 2006, Jenkins suggested that "[r]ather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (*Convergence Culture* 3). Burgess and Green argue that distinctions between production, distribution, and consumption are part of an old "broadcast media" world (57) and not useful when making sense of YouTube anymore:

It is more helpful to shift from thinking about media production, distribution, and consumption to thinking about YouTube in terms of a continuum of cultural participation. This requires us to understand all those who upload, view, comment on, or create content for YouTube, whether they are businesses, organizations, or private individuals, as participants. (57)

The extent to which viewers are not mere consumers but "inter-creative" participants is attested to by "numbers of comments and video responses" that uploaded videos attract (54). By the same token, successful contributors of videos – even those that "are quite clearly using YouTube as a business venture" – are not mere distributors but "active participants in the YouTube community" (56). "[R]eciprocal activity" is an index of their active participation which means that "vlogging YouTube stars are also subscribers to other channels, partici-

² E.g. Lessig 196; Lothian; Christiansen; with the exceptions of Strangelove 182; and Clay 219.

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pants in discussions occurring within the YouTube community, and audiences for other YouTube videos” (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105). In a similar vein, Patricia Lange suggests that “roles as viewers and creators are constantly in flux” (98). Roman Marek argues that because every recipient is also a potential sender on YouTube, a conceptual distinction between producers and viewers is not called for (45). This and cases of recombination and modification of videos by other users of the platform prompt him to speak about a circulation (“Zirkulation”) instead of a distribution and exhibition of videos (75). Burgess and Green (13, 57) and Strangelove (185) in particular argue that the ‘new’ participatory culture of YouTube (and beyond) marks a break from the ‘old’ cultures of cinema and television.

In one of the rare arguments about a history of YouTube itself, José van Dijck (2013) contends that in 2005 and 2006 YouTube was frequented by “ ‘produsing’ amateurs” – an “original group of YouTubers” – whose mode of using the platform was characterized by “uploading of content” but also by “quoting, favoriting, commenting on, responding to, archiving, editing, and mashing up videos” (115). The terms “produsage” and “produser” were coined by Axel Bruns, albeit only restrictively used for YouTube by Bruns himself.³ According to van Dijck, from 2007 on, a small number of producers and uploaders began facing a large majority of “viewers who never uploaded a single video or never commented on a posted video” (115-116). YouTube assimilated to television in terms of interface (114) and user practice (115).

These concepts and arguments can be challenged on theoretical, methodical, and empirical grounds. Burgess and Green’s “continuum of cultural participation” and Bruns’s “produsage” cannot sufficiently and positively account for YouTube users whose dedicated aim it is to create and show videos to others and who do not wish to engage with other videos and users to a similar degree. Yet I found that such users, for example SMOSH, mattered in early YouTube culture (chapters 1.3, 2.1, and 7.5). It can neither positively account for visitors of YouTube who do not wish to open a YouTube account and for registered You-

³ Axel Bruns suggests that production and producer, consumption and consumer are no useful terms to make sense of activities on various platforms, for which the creation and alteration – production at the same time as usage – of artifacts by many people is characteristic (1-2). Bruns prime example is Wikipedia, and he asserts that produsage only describes certain and probably not to the most-common ways of using YouTube (238).

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Tube users who neither wish to upload videos nor to comment and respond to other users' videos; i.e. for people who simply want to watch (chapter 7.5). The former (e.g. SMOSH) would appear to be stuck in an old media world of "broadcasting" (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 56), the latter be showing – equally dubious – "passive consumer behavior" (van Dijck 115).

The employment of language from the realms of political representation and emancipation for the activities of users on a commercially operated website is a characteristic of the concept 'participatory culture' that also needs to be mentioned here. Following John Hartley (*Television Truths* 19-35), Burgess and Green speak of "consumer-citizens" (14). Arguably, apart from being "a commercial enterprise," YouTube "is also a platform designed to enable cultural participation by ordinary citizens" (75). However, the authors do neither provide evidence that YouTube enables users to 'participate' in the specific capacity of citizens, nor that users regard themselves as citizens when uploading videos, nor that such claims would be justified.

As David Buckingham has shown, the activities of the oft-mentioned "citizen journalists" are widely overrated in terms of scale and impact ("Speaking Back?" 104). More importantly, the rhetorical link or even conflation of uploading content to a commercial website with political activity is dubious to begin with. The most elaborate critique of the ideas of participatory media and a participatory culture is offered by Mirko Tobias Schäfer:

Participation is first of all part of a rhetoric that advocates social progress through technological development, and which aims to create expectations and understandings for technology. It can be seen as an appendix in the struggle against exclusion from political decision-making processes, as well as exclusion from ownership of the means of production, and the creation of media content. The promise of social progress and a reconfiguration of power through participation is embedded in technological development and postulated anew with each 'media revolution.'

(21)

In the concept 'participatory culture' the notion that the broader realm of popular culture is political (as suggested by various critical schools) has gone bad. People use YouTube to upload videos of different kinds

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and for other purposes, but it would be wrong to regard these videos and activities as political a priori. Buckingham “would prefer to be more cautious about the apparently revolutionary possibilities of these technologies, and to await the results of further empirical research” (“Power to the People?” 236). Academia inadvertently risks supporting corporate interests of appearing as agents of the political empowerment of the masses. Apart from its theoretical, methodical, and empirical flaws, the concept of participatory culture can be rejected because it is politically problematic.

YouTube as a social medium

While an overall finding of the YouTube research is that dimensions of the service and the ways it is put to use are manifold, significant emphasis is put on communication and social networking. Patricia Lange’s primary view of YouTube is that of an example of several “video-sharing sites that facilitate communication” between people (“(Mis)conceptions” 99). Tom Sherman argues that video, on YouTube and beyond, “is the vernacular form of the era – it is the common and everyday way that people communicate” (161). Lev Manovich proposes: “[W]e moved from media to social media. Accordingly, we can also say that we are graduated from 20th century video/film to early 21st century social video” (33). Jean Burgess argues that “for those participants who actively contribute content and engage in cultural conversation around online video, YouTube is in itself a social network site; one in which videos (rather than ‘friending’) are the primary medium of social connection between participants” (101). Burgess and Green argue that “amateur” users “are engaging in textual productivity as a means to participation in social networks” (*YouTube* 32). Their “creation and sharing of videos functions culturally as a means of social networking as opposed to as a mode of cultural ‘production’” (26). Overall, on “YouTube content creation is probably far less significant than the uses of that content within various social networking settings” (58).

Apart from the notions of YouTube videos as means of communication and social networking, the notion of users as a community is also a part of the common social media framing of YouTube. Patricia Lange suggests that many users “feel that the site already is, or at least has the potential to become, a community of participants with an appreciation and affinity for exchanging videos and communicating

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with other people who share similar interests or social connections” (87). Burgess and Green refer to “the YouTube community” in various instances (e.g. 56, 67, 97) and read certain videos as celebrating YouTube as a “community of practice” (65). The term ‘community’ is not defined in the YouTube literature, but taking researchers’ use of the term as a starting point, it seems to imply a more than casual association of people who are united by common “interests” (Lange 87) or a common “practice” (Burgess and Green 65), which is – at least by name – in analogy with the concepts “communities of interest” (Henri and Pudelko 478) and “communities of practice” (Wenger 6) as they are used in different branches of the social sciences. The “YouTube community” includes “participants” from various levels of popularity (Burgess and Green 56-57). “[R]eciprocal acts” are central in arguments about users being a community (Lange 94; Burgess and Green, “The Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105). The virtual-vs.-real-communities debate of the 1990s (see Rheingold 3-66) is passé in the YouTube literature.

José van Dijck even claims that the platform YouTube itself was a “community initiative” created by “video buffs” (12). Accordingly, “the early YouTube promoted video content as a means for community formation and group activity” (114). After the “takeover by Google” the “corporate owners kept nurturing the image of collectivity and user-centered operation” for a while “after their strategies had transmogrified to the commercial realm” (12). From 2009 on several “architectural modifications distracted attention from group and social functions in favor of watching and ranking videos” (114). These arguable changes are seen in the context of YouTube’s increasing “collaboration” with the “broadcast industries” (121).

In various places throughout this study I suggest that the views of YouTube as a medium of communication and social networking and of videos as means of such communication and social networking are not descriptive of how the platform was configured and used. I also challenge the view of YouTube or YouTube users as a community.

Granted, only a minority of visitors of YouTube register and only a minority of those create and upload videos.⁴ In terms of quantified user activity, creation and upload of videos are not predominant on You-

⁴ See Burgess and Green 59; Lange, “Social Networking on YouTube,” and Strangelove 187.

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Tube. However, shouldn't such an insight cast doubts on the argument about users as participants on a "continuum of cultural participation" (Burgess and Green 57)? Moreover, if uses of videos in various "settings" outnumbered acts of creating and uploading videos (58), wouldn't this call for a thorough analysis (instead of a mere "survey" (38)) of the videos that become the objects of such manifold attention?

Downplaying or negating users' dedicated interests of audiovisual creation in a generalizing fashion is not justified taking into account the large amounts of work and effort that a number of users, including 'amateurs' like the user running the channel MORBECK (see 2.1 Who are you?), brought up to create their videos and of their, at times, complex audiovisual form (see 2.4 Stages of Production, p. 117), while simple recorded messages would have sufficed if we take the argument about videos as communication between people seriously. The overall reading of engagement with videos through other users as social networking (Burgess and Green 26, 58) is not justified looking at the ways user operations were configured by the interface (chapter 1.2) and at actual user engagement (chapters 7.3 and 7.5). In many videos in which a reference to other users or their videos is established, for example, there is no address of the creator of the original video (p. 319).

Critical YouTube studies

To some extent in opposition to the dominant participatory culture and social media framings is research we might collectively refer to as critical YouTube studies. In the introduction to the *Video Vortex Reader* of 2008 – a pioneering work in all respects – Geert Lovink asks:

Is it possible to develop a critical theory of real-time developments? Can concepts be developed that go beyond the uncritical fan culture, as promoted by Henry Jenkins, and question the corporate PR management rhetoric, without downplaying the creative-artistic and social-political use of online video? ("The Art of Watching Databases" 9)

The ongoing Video Vortex project at the University of Amsterdam's Institute of Network Cultures has organized a near dozen of conferences and published two readers to date.

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The first reader offered a wide range of perspectives; however, – already recognizable in the introduction – a dedicated focus was given to the “creative-artistic and social-political use of online video.” Findings of Jenkins’s *Convergence Culture* (2) and of Burgess and Green’s *YouTube* (57) are that popular and artistic, government and grassroots, and commercial and non-commercial activities are not easily separable anymore – if ever they have been. However, the Video Vortex project searched for cases of grassroots activism and video art conforming to established concepts. Consider Birgit Richard, summarizing her approach: “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” (141).

The focus on established notions of grassroots media activism and video art was further developed in the second reader which explicitly shifted the focus away from YouTube: *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube* (2011). Institutional video art became prominent in the second reader. Unlike Burgess and Green – and unlike Lovink’s own remark that it might be interesting “to closely investigate the messy online reality” might suggest (“Beyond Hypergrowth” 12) – the project never fully confronted YouTube’s video culture. References to YouTube videos are elitist and condescending: “And then, after a while, we get tired of all the mediagenic American college students with their mainstream rock’n’roll tastes, and we click away again” (Lovink, “The Art of Watching Databases” 11). The project first searched for established notions of video activism and art and then fully abandoned YouTube as a subject turning to video activism and institutional video art, while still benefiting – as institutional video art projects did (e.g. Nataly Bookchin’s *Mass Ornament*) – from the overall current of mainstream online video.

Alexandra Juhasz’s *Learning From YouTube* project – a website which combines the author’s research with embedded YouTube videos created by herself and her students as a part of their coursework – has a similar critical edge. However, this project suffers from the same flaws as the Video Vortex: a highly selective focus, a condescending view on YouTube’s video culture, and a dedication to established aesthetics and media activism. Consider some of the subpage headings:

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YOUTUBE IS FOR AMATEURS
WATCHING BAD VIDEO CAN'T BE GOOD
YOUTUBE MAY BE DIY, BUT IT AIN'T PUNK
TOWARD THIRDTUBE⁵

Further materials on these subpages are no less polemic or unambiguous.

The industry practice framing

There is no thorough engagement of video production for YouTube upload thus far; and the use of audiovisual techniques and the form of videos is only studied for select channels, prominently for the 'fake' video blog LONELYGIRL15 (Christian; Kuhn, "Medienreflexives Filmisches Erzählen Im Internet"). Nonetheless, an argument that YouTube videomaking happens along the lines of conventions of mainstream industry practices – if on a lower level of achievement – is sometimes made. Lev Manovich, for example, suggests that a "significant percentage of user-generated content" on YouTube "follows the templates and conventions set up by the professional entertainment industry" (36). On the one hand, Michael Strangelove argues that "video diarists forgo sophisticated forms of storytelling and production" and that "a segment of the audience is drawn towards the raw and more genuine quality of video diaries" which are distinct from "television" (65). On the other hand, he argues that "amateur" users in general "imitate the aesthetics of the professional entertainment industry" when making YouTube videos (181). In both instances, YouTube videomaking is understood only in terms of a difference from or similarity with industry practices.

The everyday creativity framing

YouTube videomaking is frequently conceptualized in terms of everyday, vernacular, or ordinary creativity and conventions. While there is no open dispute about this issue, it is the adverse position of regarding YouTube videomakers as imitators of conventions from industry practices. Speaking of the "genre" of the "virtuosic bedroom musical perfor-

⁵ "Pre-Tour: YOUTUBE IS...;" and "Post-Tour: LESSONS LEARNED."

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mance, straight to camera, vlog-style,” Jean Burgess argues that the “everydayness of the genre is all the more evident because of its situatedness in the bedroom – it draws on the long traditions of vernacular creativity” (106). In her collaboration with Joshua Green she situates YouTube video practices within “the exponential growth of more mundane and formerly private forms of ‘vernacular creativity’ as part of public culture” (*YouTube* 13). The authors take a “survey of some of YouTube’s most-popular content” and argue that “[u]nderstanding what YouTube might be for [...] requires contextualizing YouTube’s content with everyday media practices” (38). In *Watching YouTube*, building on the work of Henry Lefebvre and Mark Poster, Michael Strangelove argues: “In the context of a highly disciplined social order, the everyday video practices of amateurs provide a space for hope, optimism, freedom, liberation, and resistance” (15).

The main flaw of the everyday creativity framing is the same as that of the industry practice framing: The categorization is far too general and not based on a close and thorough analysis of YouTube videos.

The terminology relies on a binary of everyday, vernacular, amateur, and ordinary creativity and conventions on the one side; and mass media, industry, professional, and commercial creativity and conventions on the other. A first objection to this binary would be the cultural studies insight that we make sense of our everyday lives, in part, through works of commercial mass culture; such works are part of the everyday (see e.g. Willett, “Consumption, Production, and Online Identities” 66). A second objection would be that the conventions of mass culture have always been informed by everyday culture; narrative form in literature and film, for example, relies on everyday practices of storytelling (Bordwell and Thompson 68).

The everyday creativity framing cannot account for users’ attempts of creating ‘special’ videos, of extraordinary efforts taken during production (p. 117), and of all aspirations of becoming part of the media industries (p. 75). Even when writing about iconography and form of – doubtlessly private – home movies of the 1930s, Alexandra Schneider found references to star culture and the cinema conspicuous and described an interplay of the everyday and the exceptional and special (123, 157, 208).

It is necessary “to closely investigate the messy online reality” (Lovink, “Beyond Hypergrowth” 12) and to offer a thorough analysis of YouTube videos that does not presuppose a situatedness in or close relationship with ‘industry’ or ‘everyday’ culture: an analysis that traces users’ creative choices and then asks questions about distinctive-

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ness and/or relationships with other practices. Such an analysis needs to happen on different levels. When assessing relationships, it is important to be more specific than ‘industry’ or ‘everyday.’ It is probably even more important to ask for the quality of the relationship, for example, in terms of selection, combination, and transformation of conventions. I will fathom such relationships in the analyses of lip sync and musical performances (4.3) and of editing (5.2) in particular.

Despite my criticisms, each of these common tendencies and strands within YouTube studies offers important insights about YouTube; and I build on these insights in various places, for example on Patricia Lange’s complication of the idea of the ‘ordinary’ YouTube user (“(Mis)conceptions” 90; see p. 78).

The same can be said about several smaller foci within the field: Paul McDonald, and Janet Wasko and Mary Erickson shed light on the economics of YouTube. Several case studies deal with specific uses of the platform (Peters and Seier; Willett, “Parodic Practices”) or with individual users (Sørenssen).

What seems to be missing thus far is a thorough analysis of YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts. This study benefits from Eggo Müller’s findings in his article about YouTube videomaking tutorials in this regard. It also benefits from Markus Kuhn’s analysis of audiovisual techniques and narrative form on LONELYGIRL15. However, there is a lot more to find out.

1.2 YouTube as a Corporation and Online Service

Ways in which YouTube was put to use in 2005 and 2006 are the focus of this study, but in preparation for the analysis of users and videos – even for corpus formation –, establishing some baseline knowledge about the corporation YouTube and the online service it offered is necessary. What was the economic and web infrastructural framework in which user activities took place?

YouTube Inc.: a for-profit corporation

Unlike José van Dijck claims, YouTube was not a not-for-profit “community initiative” (12) that “transmogrified to the commercial realm” only later but already founded as a for-profit-venture. In a lecture at his former university campus, Jawed Karim related how the website was

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created as a “product” by himself, Chad Hurley, and Steve Chen – three former employees of PayPal – who had been “talking about starting up a company for a while.” They incorporated YouTube in February 2005. The website went online in late April. The founders talked to venture capital investors for finance from “early on.” YouTube did not charge users of the site; profits were meant to be generated through “ad revenue[s]” (Karim).

The founders were sure that the product could eventually be “profitable,” only there had to be many users uploading and watching videos first (Karim). Accordingly, in order not to put off users, advertising on the site was increased only slowly (McDonald 373). Already in October 2006 the founders handed the task of making YouTube profitable over to Google. Their own efforts and those of the supporting venture capitalist Sequoia were exceedingly remunerated through the \$1.65 billion Google paid for the company (Sorkin).

Other video hosting platforms that were started around the same time, such as OurMedia, were indeed not-for-profit initiatives (see Bruns 239). Nevertheless, all arguments about a commercialization or ‘sellout’ of YouTube from users (qtd. in McMurria), journalists (Whyte), and scholars (van Dijck; Stembeck) are beside the point because YouTube was a commercial enterprise from the beginning.⁶

Eggo Müller argues that

video-sharing sites are formatted by a cultural framework that defines a video-sharing site’s space of participation. This framework is partly generated by the web-site’s interface and partly by the users’ recurrently performed and thus “highly institutionalized actions.” (“Formatted Spaces of Participation” 59)⁷

He also suggests that “[b]oth the framework and the rules and conventions that define this space of participation have to be analyzed in much more detail” (59). The following sections will be looking at the YouTube web interface in 2005 and 2006 in preparation of corpus

⁶ See, in line with the argument made here, Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 76; and Strangelove 191.

⁷ Quoting Lynne Zucker, “The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence,” *American Sociological Review* 42 (1977): 727.

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formation and the analysis of uses of YouTube throughout the rest of this study.

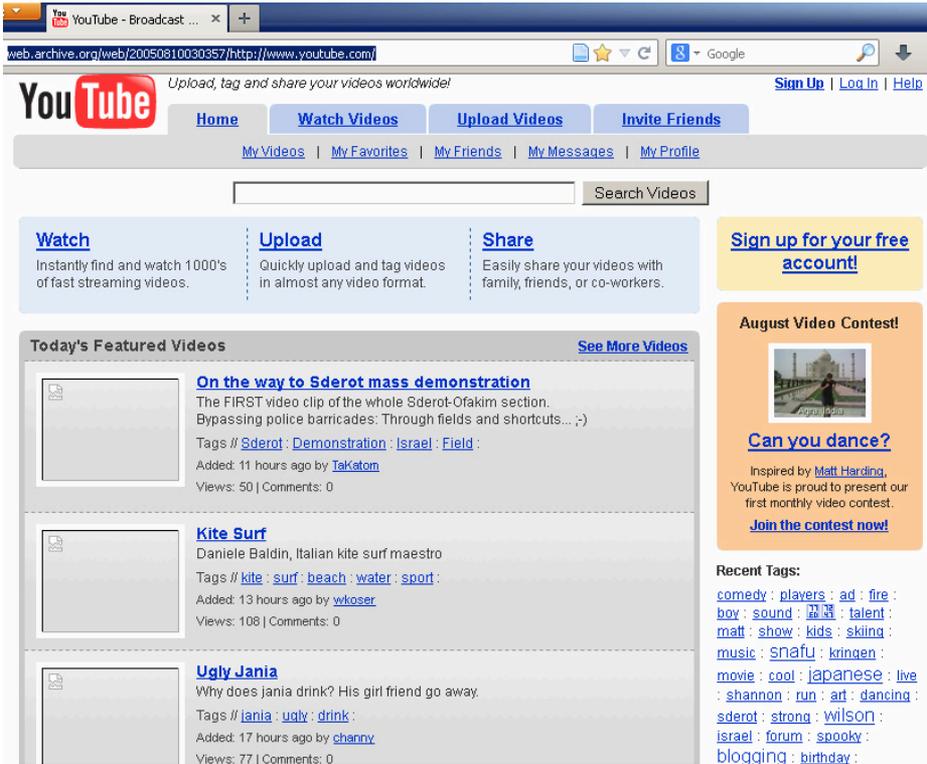
The Internet Archive is a valuable resource for researching the history of websites. It starts tracking a page after finding it while ‘crawling’ the web or after a user enters the page’s URL at the Archive to search for an archived version of the page (“Frequently Asked Questions”). This explains that not all pages of the YouTube website were archived, and that those that were archived typically only after being online for a while. What is more, the Internet Archive did not store all pages at the same frequency. Accordingly, it is not always possible to precisely date the appearance of new pages or changes to existing pages. The *YouTube Blog*, in which the company announces changes to the service, is another source in this regard. YouTube’s home page has been sporadically archived since April 28, 2005, and about daily since June 14. Ranking pages were archived every couple of days or weeks. About half of user profile pages and video pages were archived once or sporadically. The Internet Archive is not perfect but it is the best source for historical web data we have.

User operations

YouTube’s home page looked the same to all Internet users irrespective of their media industry affiliation or a preferred form of using the platform. Various operations were offered by the interface and possible for the same Internet users (Fig. 1.2.1). In the process of registering on the website, YouTube did not distinguish between kinds of users either.

Moreover, a user could use the same user account to perform various operations, such as uploading videos, watching videos, rating videos, marking videos as favorites, sharing videos via Email or posting them to other websites, commenting on videos, and posting videos in response to other users’ videos. Arguments against conceptualizing YouTube in terms of production, distribution, and consumption rest on these interface attributes and the ways in which they were arguably put to use (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 56-57; Marek 45). In this section, I want to look at these user operations more closely.

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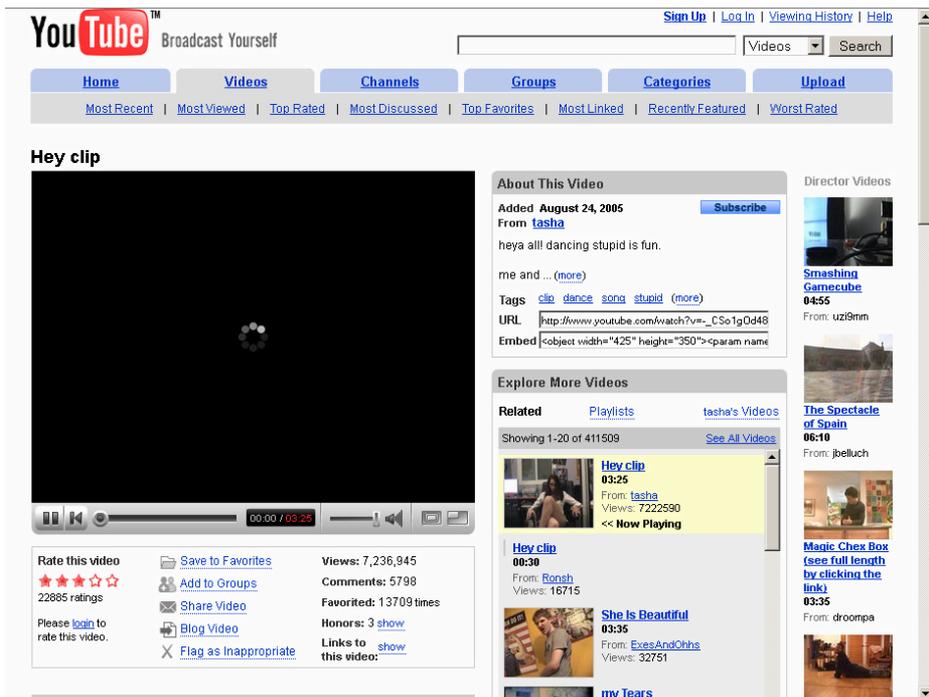


1.2.1 Cropped screenshot of YouTube's home page, archived by the Internet Archive on August 10, 2005.

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Basic properties of user operations

Every user operation was configured as an operation of an individual user that did or did not have a consequence for another user. Watching a video, for example, involved an active user who watched a video on a video page and a passive user whose video was being watched (see Fig. 1.2.2). The view count on that user's video page went up by one. Uploading a video, by contrast, was an operation involving a single active user that did not have a direct consequence for another user. It merely increased the offerings of the platform by another video.



1.2.2 Screenshot of the loading video page of one of the videos from the corpus, TASHA's *Hey clip*, archived July 20, 2006.

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The screenshot displays a YouTube video interface. At the top, a video player shows a progress bar at 00:00 / 03:25. Below the player, the video title is "Rate this video" with a star rating of 4.5 (22885 ratings) and a "Please login to rate this video" prompt. Interaction options include "Save to Favorites", "Add to Groups", "Share Video", "Blog Video", and "Flag as Inappropriate". Video statistics show 7,236,945 views, 5,798 comments, 13,709 favorites, and 3 honors. A "Video Responses" section shows four user-generated thumbnails with names: PinkPandaPr, pakez17, sandvanna, and thekillero. Below this is a "Recent Comments (5798 total)" section with a "Post a new comment" link. The first comment is from jeff3oh5cuh (20 hours ago) saying "you guys are both so cute and you dance so adorableeeeeee". A second comment from ukanthandlethetruth (19 hours ago) says "good music" and "the pixies make everything alright". A third comment from u 2 r good also says "u 2 r good also". On the right side, there is a "Now Playing" section with video thumbnails and titles: "Hey clip" (00:30), "She Is Beautiful" (03:35), "my Tears" (04:10), and "'Friends Forever' Marauders Cheerleaders" (05:44). A "Just Like" section lists "Emmalina: Lazydork Raps" (02:41) and "From: rickyste".

1.2.3 Scrolled down view of the same video page.

In a concert space different musicians are meant to produce sounds in the same setting. On Wikipedia different users are meant to edit the same article (see Bruns 107; van Dijck 134). On YouTube, by contrast, there was no operation that defined an activity for two or more active users. Every operation configured by the YouTube interface was an operation for a single active user. All registered YouTube users could upload videos, but each video would be attributed to a single user account only. All registered users could also comment on a video, but each comment would be attributed to and accompanied by a single user name when shown on the website (Fig. 1.2.3). The extent to which YouTube enabled activities for individual users set high thresholds for online collaboration between the users of different accounts (similarly: Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 65).

The interface did not define an operation with a reciprocal activity either. On a telephone line two people can speak and listen to each other at the same time. Video phone services like Skype configured such a reciprocal activity on the levels of sound and image. On You-

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Tube there was no such thing: Showing and watching videos were separate operations. There was no hypothetical operation like ‘watching each other’s videos’ defined by the interface. Arguments about YouTube’s “potential for two-way communication” (van Dijck 114) risk mixing up the option to react with a comment or video response with the true two-way communication offered by other services.

While users could use the same account to perform all operations – like watching, uploading, and sharing videos – , operations were not interlocked but discrete: Typing into a specific field and clicking on a specific button would trigger not all operations that were possible but only one of them. This is very important for understanding how users that could perform the same operations empirically turned out to be performing one operation more than the other (see chapters 2.1 and 7.5).

Genealogy and prioritization of operations

Each of these operations relied on one or more operations from historical and contemporary media in name and function in order to be ‘readable’ for users. YouTube in general can be understood as a remediation of other media (Grusin 61). As I am going to show in the following, for many of these operations a genealogical relation with the distribution, exhibition, and viewership of audiovisual contents in other media – television in particular – was conspicuous.

In the operations ‘uploading a video’ and ‘watching a video’ such distribution/exhibition logic was coupled with the Internet logic of upload and download.⁸ These operations were prominently signposted on YouTube’s home page (Fig. 1.2.1). It is significant that ‘watching a video’ was the default operation for engaging with videos: As soon as an Internet user requested a video page (e.g. by following a link from another YouTube page, external web page, or Email), the video file was loaded along with the web page and began streaming in the video player window of the page (Fig. 1.2.2). An Internet user did not have to

⁸ Nonetheless, YouTube never allowed users to download videos for further use. YouTube popularized video streaming, that is, the simultaneous transmission and play of a video file on a browser – without an option of storing the file on a local hard drive (see Burgess and Green 65).

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press a play button: YouTube initiated instantaneous exhibition of the audiovisual material for an Internet user to watch.

The operations of ‘rating’ and ‘favoriting’ videos (see Fig. 1.2.2) can also be traced back to familiar media worlds, to “market research” of audiences in particular (Schröter 342). Because users of such operations “leave traces” on video pages, Burgess and Green regard them as “practices of participation” (*YouTube* 57). For Jens Schröter by contrast, such activities and YouTube in general do not deserve the label “participatory” because they do “not transcend” but reinforce “the given capitalist logic of competition and attention” (342). David Buckingham cautions that “contemporary media often depend upon ‘activity’ on the part of consumers, but that does not necessarily mean that consumers are more powerful: activity should not be confused with agency” (“A Commonplace Art?” 43).⁹

Users could subscribe to the videos of other users from October 2005 on (see *YouTube Blog*, Oct. 25). “Subscribe” buttons were shown on video pages and user profile pages (Fig. 1.2.4). Upon logging into YouTube, a subscribing user would receive notification if a subscribed-to user had uploaded a new video (see *YouTube Blog*, Oct. 25 and Dec. 14). The term subscription has a long history in print media distribution and in subscription-based television. Profile pages were recast as “Channel” pages at the beginning of June 2006 (Figs. 1.2.5; *YouTube Blog*, June 2). Müller correctly asserts that “as in traditional broadcast television, the concept of ‘channels’ structures the way clips are distributed online” (57). Apart from subscribing, ‘viewing’ the profile/channel page of another user (see Fig. 1.2.5: “Channel Views”), and ‘editing’ one’s own profile/channel page¹⁰ were operations in which terms and functionality from television and Web 2.0 services were combined (see also Harley and Fitzpatrick 681).

It is probably not too far fetched to suggest that the operations treated thus far coded a relationship between a viewer and a distributor/exhibitor of a video or the video itself. What about the operations ‘commenting’ on a video and ‘posting a video response’ to a video?

⁹ Unless stated otherwise, all emphases in quotations are from the quoted works. In order to avoid confusion with *video titles* and *book titles*, I do not use italicize emphases but use the slightly outdated format of increased letterspacing.

¹⁰ See YouTube’s invitation to “Edit Your Profile” in the announcement of customizable profile pages (*YouTube Blog*, 28 Feb.).

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Commenting was possible on video pages at least from July 2005 on.¹¹ The “Video Response” function was introduced in May 2006 (*YouTube Blog*, 16 May). The YouTube “interface specifically invites users to post comments on clips; further, users can respond to the comments themselves, or users can post another video in response to a clip.” From this Müller deducts:

As compared to traditional broadcast television, in which only a few formatted moments existed in specific programs when members of the audience can literally respond, a dialogic structure is characteristic of online video-sharing sites, which links YouTube to traditions of oral cultures. (57)

The particular ways in which these forms of response were configured, however, suggest to me a clearly subordinate position with regards to the responded-to video – much less than a dialogic position which would imply an equal status of statements. The invitations to post a video response and to post a text comment were small pieces of hyper-linked text positioned below the video player and the video’s statistical data (Fig. 1.2.3). The posted video responses themselves were represented as a row of tiny thumbnail images, also below these fields. The most-recent comments were compiled in small-print even further down. Older comments were only shown on a further page visible upon clicking “View All Comments.” On most screens and browsers, invitations to respond and actual video responses and comments were out of view when a video page was loaded (Fig. 1.2.2): Visitors had to scroll down to see them.¹² The interface did not configure response between ‘participants’ at eye level.

What is more, these optional operations were temporally and logically following the default operation of watching a video. Thus I suggest that they should still be regarded as operations configuring viewers of audiovisual contents: viewers that were expected to

¹¹ See YouTube’s home page archived on July 10, 2005, where featured videos are shown with numbers of comments.

¹² I took these screenshots on a screen with a 4/3 aspect ratio. I maximized the vertical view by banning the Windows XP taskbar to the left side of the screen. Still, none of the mentioned functions were in view without scrolling. On a 16/9 screen or with the taskbar displayed on the bottom, the vertical view would be even smaller.

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watch a video and could do more than that. These potentially responsive viewers were positioned in a subordinate position with regards to a distributor/exhibitor and her or his video. I am also not sure if these textual and audiovisual operations should really be traced back to oral cultures (Müller 57). Letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines are probably a less-removed cultural form – a form that configures readers which remain subordinate to editors and journalists in an analog manner.

To “Share,” to “Blog,” and to “Embed” a video were related operations genuine to Web 2.0 infrastructure and culture (Fig. 1.2.2). The sharing function provided the video’s URL ready to copy-paste into an Email or onto a social network profile. A click from an Email or profile would lead users to the video on YouTube. A video could be embedded by copy-pasting a snippet of HTML code onto a blog or website. This code would create a video player window streaming the video to the blog or website itself. These operations were profoundly related to the idea of videos ‘going viral,’ that is, becoming wildly successful by being spread via Email and on other websites (see Burgess 101). The position of these operations in the vicinity of operations like “Rate” and “Save to Favorites” suggests that they were also configured as viewer operations.

YouTube also configured user operations that are familiar from social networking sites, like adding another user as a “friend” and sending another user a “Message” (Figs. 1.2.4-5). Jawed Karim named Friendster, a now-defunct website that for the first time “commoditized social networking,” as a service from which YouTube borrowed such functionality. These operations did not configure a hierarchical association between a viewer and a distributor/exhibitor or her videos but an association between one person and another at eye level. Unlike a subscription, an addition as a friend only came about if the added user approved of the addition. Adding another user as a friend was not possible on video pages, where only “Subscribe” buttons were shown,¹³ but only on user profile pages, on pages that could be accessed by clicking on a user name on a video page.

¹³ See e.g. video page of the video *Hamster* (THECYBERSEB) at the Internet Archive on Nov. 2, 2005.

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A profile page archived on November 18, 2005 shows a balance between text and functionality framing a user as a person and as a distributor/exhibitor or viewer of videos (Fig. 1.2.4). The user name is introduced by a colloquial “Hello. I’m [USER NAME]” phrase. There are various fields for optional personal information. Other users are invited to add the user as a “friend” and send her a message. The button to “Subscribe” to her videos, the current number of subscribers and profile views frames the user as a distributor/exhibitor of videos. The number of “watched” videos frames her as a viewer of videos.

The screenshot shows the YouTube interface for a user profile. At the top, the YouTube logo is on the left, and the tagline "Upload, tag and share your videos worldwide!" is in the center. On the right, there are links for "Sign Up", "Log In", and "Help". Below the logo is a navigation bar with buttons for "Home", "Videos", "Channels", "Friends", and "Upload". A secondary navigation bar shows the user's profile and statistics: "Profile | Public Videos (13) | Private Videos (0) | Favorites (65) | Friends (24) | Playlists (1)".

The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains the user's profile information:

- Hello. I'm thaumata.**
- I have **10 subscribers!**
- I have watched 920 videos!
- My profile has been viewed 40 times!
- Last Login:** 18 hours ago
- Signed up:** 2 months ago
- Gender:** Female
- About Me:** I don't know what to tell you. I'm just a normal girl - a real person. I have been recording video diary entries for a long time, but it's only very recently I decided to actually start posting them.
- there are some more videos that are not public. until I have a better feel for who is watching, I don't know that I'm quite ready to share them with the entire planet. (and no, they aren't pornographic. they're just personal.)
- if you'd like to see those, friend me and drop me a line.
- Personal Website:** <http://thaumata.com>
- Hometown:** chicago, il
- Current Country:** US
- Interests & Hobbies:** making boys cry.

The right column contains a "Latest Video Added" section:

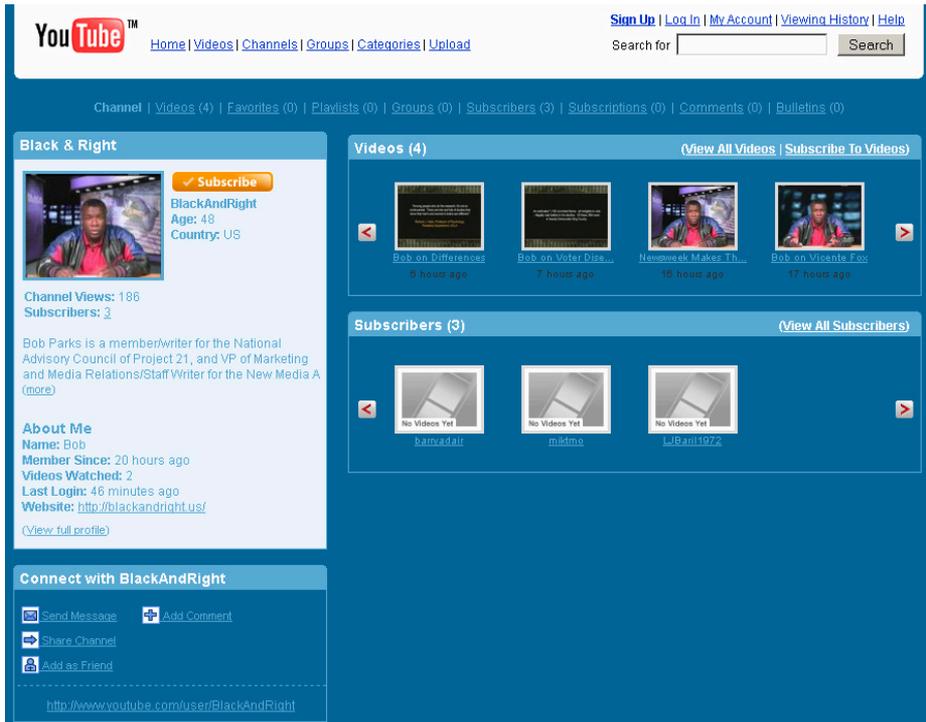
- Latest Video Added**
- NOW HIRING!**
- Added: 2 days ago
- [Sign up](#) or [log in](#) to add thaumata as a friend.
- [Send Message](#)
- [Subscribe to thaumata's Videos](#)

1.2.4 Cropped screenshot of a user profile page (THAUMATA) archived on November 18, 2005.

This balance on profile pages gradually shifted to the distribution/exhibition of videos, especially when user profiles were recast as “Channels” in early June 2006. The “Subscribe” button became the most-visible item in the box with the channel information (Fig. 1.2.5). A

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box with thumbnail images linking to the user's videos was also prominent. The colloquial "Hello" message introducing the user as a person was gone, and most of the optional personal information was only visible upon clicking "View Full Profile." Compared to the flashy "Subscribe" button on top of the page, the drab link to send a user a "Message" and to add her/him as a "Friend" on the bottom of the page are inconspicuous.



1.2.5 Cropped screenshot of a user profile page (BLACKANDRIGHT) archived on September 26, 2006. Profile pages had been recast as channel pages by this time.

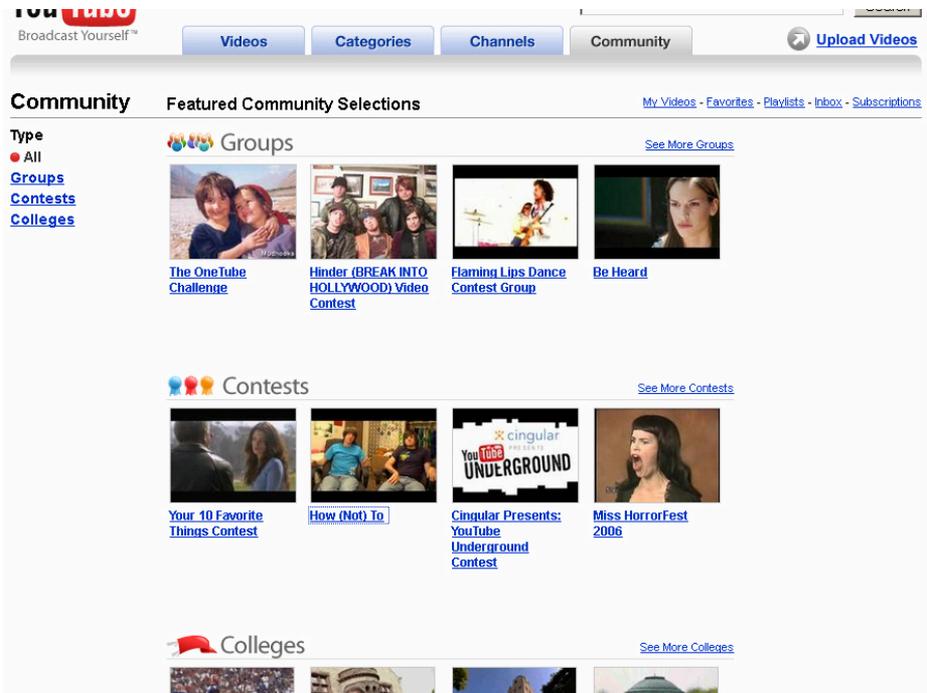
From January 2006 on YouTube users were able to found and join groups in order "to share and discuss videos with other YouTube members" (*YouTube Blog*, 19 Jan.). A "Groups" tab was added to the header section of the home page and other pages (Fig. 1.2.6). Groups enabled communal activities (see van Dijck 114), but they were probably less designed for a putative overall YouTube community than for

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communities on a smaller scale (see Jenkins, “Cultural Theory of YouTube” 94). The “Groups” tab was on position four of six from its inception, which suggests that it was not attributed a lot of importance to by the interface. Together with “Contests” and “Colleges,” “Groups” were subsumed under the new “Community” tab in December; a tab which was shown on number four of four tabs (Fig. 1.2.7).



1.2.6 Cropped screenshot of YouTube home page on January 26, 2006. Introduction of “Groups.”



1.2.7 “Groups” subsumed under “Community” – along with “Contests” and “Colleges” – on December 16, 2006.

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User operations in conclusion

YouTube supported the distribution/exhibition and viewership of videos on the one hand and social networking on the other at different times to different degrees. Nevertheless, at all times the former dominated over the latter. Most user operations on YouTube, and the user operations that were most prominent, configured an interaction between a viewer of videos and a distributor/exhibitor of videos or the videos themselves – and not between members of a social network or community. YouTube’s home page as it was archived on August 10, 2005 already indicates a hierarchy between preferred kinds of uses that has prevailed: “Watch” and “Upload” of videos stick out as activities that were repeatedly and prominently presented to users and visitors of the site. The buttons “Friends” and “Messages” were less prominent (Fig. 1.2.1). After four months of experimentation, this was the first home layout that was not radically overhauled during the next couple of years. I traced YouTube’s home page and video page layouts at the Internet Archive at intervals of six months until June 2016, and the same hierarchy was conspicuous throughout. On user profile pages, where there had been a balance between distribution/exhibition and viewership of videos and communication and social networking for some time, this balanced tipped already in the first half of 2006.

The genealogy of most operations and the ways operations were prioritized confound notions of a break from broadcast television and other media of one-way distribution (e.g. van Dijck 114) since YouTube fundamentally relied on such media in designing its service. A principal position that an Internet and YouTube user was invited to occupy was that of a viewer. Viewers could do more than watch, but watching was configured as the default operation of engaging with audiovisual contents on YouTube as elsewhere. The ways in which the early interface was configured suggest that distribution, exhibition, and viewership¹⁴ are apt terms to make sense of the interface side of YouTube.

The mentioned home layout was archived only four months after the platform went online, when it was still in public beta, and long before numbers of visitors and users soared, as the low numbers of views of

¹⁴ In analogy with ‘spectatorship,’ ‘viewership’ is used as a term for the property of being a viewer of audiovisual contents. Later on in the study, it is also used to collectively refer to the viewers of a user’s videos and of YouTube videos in general.

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the “Featured Videos” indicate (Fig. 1.2.1). It was before YouTube began receiving mainstream news coverage in November 2005,¹⁵ made first attempts of collaborating with established industry players in March 2006 (Noon), and was acquired by Google in October (Leeds and Sorkin). An analysis of the early YouTube interface thus questions the narrative of a social networking and community video platform morphing into a platform for the distribution/exhibition and ‘consumption’ of videos in the context of corporate takeover and arrangements with industry players (van Dijck 12, 114, and 120-121).

Of course, users could use the functions provided by the interface against their prioritization. They could also use an interface function in a way that differed from its intended use (see e.g. p. 323).

Most importantly, user activities were not the ‘result’ of configurations of the interface in a straightforward way: User activities prompted YouTube to introduce or discontinue interface functions in several instances. The Video Response function, for example, was inspired by users who quoted video titles of other videos in the titles of their own videos (Karim; *YouTube Blog*, 16 May 2006). While there would be no user activities on YouTube without the service, the interface and user activities evolved in interplay from the moment the service went online.

A system for assessing a user’s preferred way of using the service

The YouTube interface did not distinguish between preferred forms of use when a user registered. Thus to a certain extent all users were treated equally and were all “participants” (see Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 57). However, on the platform they began to use, hierarchical operations from the distribution, exhibition, and viewership audiovisual contents in other media dominated, and the prime positions that a user could occupy were those of a distributor/exhibitor and of a viewer of videos. Users’ actual use of the service was tracked and quantified (see Snickars and Vonderau 16). Moving on from Burgess/Green (57) and Marek (45), I suggest that the platform YouTube was a system which a user did not have to enter as one kind or the other but in

¹⁵ It seems that the first mainstream media mention of YouTube is an article in *The New York Times* that introduced several video platforms on Oct. 27 (Kirsner).

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which a user was certainly expected to turn out to be one kind or the other. The analysis in chapters 2.1 and 7.5 will suggest that there turned out to be a small number of producer/distributor/exhibitors (i.e. users who created videos and showed them on the platform) and a large number of viewers, most of whom did not engage with videos beyond watching them.

The screenshot shows a grid of 20 YouTube channels ranked by total subscribers. Each entry includes a profile picture, the channel name, and statistics for views and subscribers. The channels are arranged in four rows and five columns. The top row includes channels like 'FilthyWhore' and 'sexxiebebe23'. The second row features 'smosh' and 'bowiechick'. The third row includes 'tasha' and 'thaumata'. The bottom row lists 'digitalfilmmaker' and 'Tygerlilly33'. The 'All Time' filter is selected at the top right of the grid.

Channel Name	Views	Subscribers
FilthyWhore	191527	1469
sexxiebebe23	239781	1418
schizoar	153850	1158
strawberrie	96232	961
smosh	400456	2986
bowiechick	134925	791
animextenshi	92242	752
whiteflower	104740	731
Brookers	109169	716
MadV	103595	683
tasha	97157	642
EmoKid21Ohio	109484	607
guitar90	66668	558
hanism	27260	542
thaumata	46233	613
digitalfilmmaker	27277	541
Tygerlilly33	48839	504
aznqr1	45903	464
avlucky105	42239	459
glenriv	27295	455

1.2.8 Cropped screenshot of the “Most Subscribed” of “All Time” ranking archived on May 17, 2006.¹⁶

¹⁶ The Archive did not store thumbnail images for all ranked channels, which is why some thumbnails are missing here. YouTube referred to users as “Members” for about three months (see home page archived on March 3 and June 4).

1.2 YouTube as a Corporation and Online Service

With the introduction of the “Most Subscribed” of “All Time” ranking page in April 2006, YouTube, in a way, began looking at what users had turned out to be: The ranking did not list all users, but only the 20 users with the largest numbers of subscribers (Fig. 1.2.8). While user accounts could still be used to perform various operations, a pragmatic distinction between users that tended to be subscribed to and those that tended to subscribe was introduced to the interface. Some users more than others were represented as distributor/exhibitors on the platform.

In April 2006 YouTube introduced the optional “Director” status for user accounts. Upon applying, an “original content creator” could be awarded the status of a “Director” from the company (*YouTube Blog*, 10 April). Profile page and video pages would sport the label “Director.” The profile page became highly customizable. Videos were exempted from the 10-minute limit on video duration, which had been introduced to prevent upload of complete TV episodes and movies a couple of weeks earlier (*YouTube Blog*, 26 March). Videos from ‘Directors’ would be prominently shown in many places on YouTube from July on (see e.g. Fig. 1.2.2). Like the introduction of the Most Subscribed ranking, the introduction of the Director status was a moment when YouTube assessed what users had turned out to be: Individual distinctions if a user was a producer/distributor/exhibitor, a viewer, or even an uploader of third-party content were made by YouTube staff when a user applied for the Director status. This development already points to the introduction of the user Partner Program about a year later, which enabled selected users who uploaded videos they had created themselves or that they owned the commercial usage rights of to receive a share of the advertising revenues their videos generated (see p. 339).

YouTube videos

YouTube was about videos

Without users there would be no videos on YouTube: Like other Web 2.0 companies, YouTube did not provide content itself but offered a platform for users to provide content (O’Reilly; Schäfer 22). Thus it made sense to begin this brief analysis of interface parameters with user operations. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasize that videos were the main kind of content provided on YouTube and at the center of how the platform could be used. The prominence of the

1.2 YouTube as a Corporation and Online Service

operations “Upload” and “Watch” and of the list of “Featured Videos” on the home page is indicative of the centrality of videos on YouTube (Fig. 1.2.1). YouTube primarily supported sharing of videos – and not of user profiles – in Emails and on text blogging and social networking platforms.

What characterizes the content provided on YouTube as videos? A YouTube user selected an audio-video file from a drive on her/his computer for upload. This file and the audiovisual material therein already existed before the upload and continued to exist after being streamed to a viewer’s browser from YouTube’s servers, because it was still on the drive of the contributing user (unless it had been dedicatedly deleted) and also stored by YouTube. The material had a specific duration and a first and a last frame. Because its existence exceeded the time of being streamed to a viewer’s browser, the material could be watched again and shown to others.¹⁷

The path of a video from contributor to viewer

Apart from selecting an audio-video file, a contributing user had to supply a title. A written description and tags were optional. The user decided whether to make the video accessibly to all YouTube users and visitors or to her/his YouTube “Friends” only. The audio-video file and the other data were transferred to one of YouTube’s servers. A database entry with an eleven-digit ID was created; for *Hey clip*, uploaded by the user of the account TASHA, for example, this ID was - _CSo1gOd48. All the while YouTube converted the uploaded video file – irrespective of the original technical file format – into a Flash Video file and stored the result (Snickars 302). As soon as this process was completed, the video and related data could be accessed on a video page on the Web. In the case of *Hey clip* the URL of the video page streaming the video was http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_CSo1gOd48 (Fig. 1.2.2).

YouTube did not review videos during the process of uploading, but once a video appeared on the website, viewers were invited to check

¹⁷ Throughout the following chapters it will become clear that the videos uploaded by the users from the corpus where more than indiscriminate audiovisual material of a specific duration: They were audiovisual artifacts (see also 1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis, p. 47).

1.2 YouTube as a Corporation and Online Service

for compliance with the “Community Guidelines” and to “Flag” a video where necessary. Pornography, “videos showing dangerous or illegal acts,” extreme violence, “hate speech,” videos revealing “personal information” about others and videos violating copyright were deemed “inappropriate” (“Community Guidelines,” Internet Archive, 24 Oct. 2006). Flagged videos were reviewed by YouTube staff and removed if they did not comply. Obviously, censorship on YouTube was a controversial topic on YouTube and beyond (see Kampman 153). The company also announced to remove videos that infringed on the copyright of third parties if notified by these parties (see “Terms of Use,” Internet Archive, 28 April 2005).

The public availability of a YouTube video ended when the contributing user or YouTube removed the video from the account or terminated the account. If an Internet user entered the URL after the removal, YouTube sent a standardized web page which named the reason for the video being unavailable but no video-specific data.¹⁸

It is important to realize that the agency that was responsible for a video being accessible was both with YouTube and the contributing user. Integrated activities of YouTube and the contributing user made the video accessible on the Web. Also, an intervention from either side could end the video’s availability.

1.3 Corpus Formation

For several reasons, uses of YouTube in 2005 and 2006 are the focus of this study. I already suggested that a fresh engagement with the early years of YouTube and the arguments made in the research literature thus far – from the distance of a couple of years after the peak of YouTube research – might prove fruitful (chapter 1.1). YouTube went online in late April 2005, thus setting a starting point for the period under analysis was not too difficult. I chose to end the analysis with the end of 2006 because YouTube had become an institution in the Internet world and was prepared to become an institution in the

¹⁸ Paul Robinett, for example, removed *Build a Works Bomb with Renetto* some time after I archived the video. In October 2012 entering the URL would produce a web page which said: “This video has been removed by the user. / Sorry about that.”

1.3 Corpus Formation

media world by that time. It also appeared that certain conventions for making YouTube videos had been established by then.

While 2005 and 2006 were very dynamic YouTube years, the following years were far less eventful. 2006 was the year of YouTube's hypergrowth: YouTube was the most-visited site for online video already at the beginning of the year (Cashmore) and was #6 of all websites towards the end. It climbed to the top 3 much slower during the course of 2007, where it remained to the present (see Alexa, "Global Top 500," Internet Archive, 25 Dec. 2006, 16 Nov. 2007, 9 June 2016).

Ownership of the platform changed in October 2006 and has not changed since. With the acquisition of YouTube by Google, the startup's interests were aligned with those of a major Internet corporation. YouTube's compliance with requests from large rights holders to remove copyrighted content uploaded by users without rights holders' permission was even more important for YouTube's emergence as an institution in the Internet and media worlds. In early 2006 it was still debated if YouTube might become a "video Napster," that is, be legally shut down ("Video Napster?," *Newsweek*). At the end of the year it was clear that this would not be the case. YouTube struck licensing agreements, for example with Warner Music (McDonald 387). A significant number of the Google shares that paid for YouTube directly went to major rights holders (Leeds and Sorkin). YouTube would be working with and within the mainstream media landscape, would eventually attain mainstream media status itself (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 35).

Particularly relevant for this project was the appearance of a number of unacknowledged fictional user characters (sometimes referred to as 'fakes' on YouTube) between April and June 2006, for example of the character Bree who seemed to be running LONELYGIRL15 (channel introduced p. 71). An important hypothesis at the beginning of the project was that by that time conventions of production, setting, performance, use of audiovisual techniques, or overall form had to have been established on YouTube, for otherwise it would not have been possible to emulate a regular YouTube user's channel and videos. In the context of the overall interest of this project in videomaking and videos, the time of formation of conventions seemed particularly relevant: the years 2005 and 2006, that is.

1.3 Corpus Formation

It did not seem advised to study videos irrespective of the users who uploaded them, thus I took user channels as a starting point for corpus formation.¹⁹ Taking users – and not individual videos – as a starting point aligns my project with Patricia Lange’s, while her interests are, as I previously pointed out, in YouTube as a social system (“(Mis)-conceptions” 87).

Like Burgess and Green, I assumed that user channels and videos that were successful in YouTube’s rankings were particularly important in YouTube’s “common culture” (39). The ‘Most Subscribed’ of ‘All Time’ ranking “represent[ed] a collective performance” of what YouTube users “value[d] most” (60). Through their representation in the ranking, the ranked user channels enjoyed a heightened visibility on the platform. I assumed that they became models for other users who created videos – a hypothesis that was eventually confirmed by the analysis of references between the videos released on different channels (p. 321).

The ranking was introduced in April 2006; and the Internet Archive started tracking the ranking on May 17, 2006. Accordingly, it was possible to establish the 20 most subscribed user channels at particular moments from that time on. Subscriptions were additive, that is, ranked users had been collecting subscriptions since opening their accounts or since October 2005 (when “Subscribe to [USER NAME]’s Videos” buttons were added to channel and video pages) until a given version of the ‘Most Subscribed’ page was archived. The channels listed on the ranking as it was archived on May 17 had been opened between August 2005 and April 2006, and upload of videos had typically started at the time of registration. Thus the earliest archived version of the “Most Subscribed” page and the videos released up to that moment could, to a certain extent, also account for YouTube’s popular culture before May 17, 2006. For the time before May 2006, there did not seem to be a better way of establishing which user channels were successful or even online.

¹⁹ YouTube began referring to user ‘profiles’ as user ‘channels’ only from early June 2006 on (see p. 30). During corpus formation and analysis, I found it impracticable to use two terms depending on the moment a user had joined or a video had been uploaded and thus use ‘channel’ in most instances throughout this study.

1.3 Corpus Formation

To form a corpus of user channels and videos, I looked at the “Most Subscribed” of “All Time” ranking archived on three different dates:

- May 17, the first time the ranking was ever archived,
- July 19, when LONELYGIRL15 appeared in the ranking for the first time, and
- December 31, the last time the ranking was archived in 2006.

Choosing July 19 was based on a hypothesis at the beginning of the project that LONELYGIRL15 might have been a turning point in YouTube culture. This hypothesis did not turn out to be true. However, summer 2006 was a very dynamic time for YouTube as a company and for YouTube as a cultural system, thus the date made sense also without attributing key significance to LONELYGIRL15.

I already noted that only about half of YouTube’s channel and video pages were archived by the Internet Archive and no such pages regularly (p. 25). To make things worse, in the case of video pages the Archive saved the HTML pages but in most instances not the embedded video files. Thus, effectively, I could only deal with channels that were still online and still held videos from 2005 and 2006. At the time of corpus formation, in January 2010, of the 48 channels that appeared in one or more of the archived rankings

- 33 channels were still online and still held videos from 2005 and 2006;
- 11 channels had been “terminated” by YouTube “due to repeated or severe violations” of the “Community Guidelines and/or claims of copyright infringement,” according to the error message that showed up when entering the URL provided by the archived ranking;
- 1 channel had been closed down by the user, according to another error message; and
- 3 channels were still online but did not hold videos from 2005 and 2006 anymore.

I conducted an explorative analysis of the videos uploaded in 2005 and 2006 to the 33 user channels that were still online and that held videos from these years. I found that there was a vast majority of channels that shared several traits and a few others that did not share them. These traits were the following:

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- upload of videos with live action,
- the appearance of the user or of a fictional user character in the videos,
- upload of different kinds of videos to the same user channel,
- claims by the user or fictional user character of producing the videos, and
- release of videos at more or less regular intervals.

Thus there seemed to be a predominant group among the 33 user channels and a few others that ‘stuck out.’ There was no channel that primarily released animated videos. There was only one channel on which no user or fictional user character appeared in the videos: TYGERLILLY33, a channel of mashup videos created from television content. There were a few channels on which there were no user claims of producing the videos (e.g. MSIVIDEO and RYANLESLIETV). Finally, there was only a single channel (JUDSONLAIPPLY) on which it appeared that there had never been regular contribution of videos.

I decided to deal with this predominant group of user channels for the subsequent stages of the project. The 28 channels that shared these traits constitute the corpus for my project and are the object of the following chapters. More precisely, the corpus consists of the videos uploaded to these channels in 2005 and 2006 that were still online at the time of corpus formation.

Someone might argue that the predominance of these channels was the result of censorship from the company, and that it therefore gives an ‘inaccurate’ picture of YouTube’s popular culture at the time; more precisely, that channels offering third-party content were a lot more important really. However, such an objection would involve an understanding of YouTube culture in a discursive vacuum without the activities of YouTube Inc. There would be no YouTube culture without the company YouTube; and YouTube video culture is to a certain extent the result of censorship indeed (see p. 41). Besides this theoretical objection, I will also offer a pragmatic one: We do not know how many of the 11 “terminated” channels were removed because of copyright infringement, the second of two possible reasons for such an action from the company. Even if – hypothetically – all 11 channels had been removed because of offering third-party content, the 28 channels of the corpus would still constitute the majority among the 48 channels listed in the rankings and thus be indicative of a predominant use of YouTube among successful contributors of videos.

1.3 Corpus Formation

I provisionally referred to user channels (including the uploaded videos) with these traits as video blogs. For once, such a use of ‘video blog’ was in analogy with the wide version of ‘video blog’ used on the platform itself. The user of the channel BLUNTY3000, for example, listed a variety of videos – diarist, home dance and lip sync videos and parodic impersonations of other users – in his tutorial *Vblog – how to be popular on youtube*. More narrowly, ‘video blog’ was also used for individual diarist videos, for example in the video title *First Videoblog* on BOWIECHICK. Using an overall term seemed apt to account for the fact that the same users were producing different kinds of videos and uploading them to the same channels. The user of BOWIECHICK herself, for example, also created and uploaded music videos (e.g. *Little Wonder*). Thus I use ‘public diary clip’ for videos referred to by the narrow version of the term on YouTube (see 2.3 Kinds of Videos).

Furthermore, the use of ‘video blog’ for the channels of the corpus was in analogy with its use by a few other researchers. According to Patricia Lange, on a “video blog” we can find “everything from ‘shows’ for entertainment purposes to more spontaneous, diary-centric, and informal communicative forms of video making” (“(Mis)conceptions” 87). “[V]log entries” were the most common “user-created” videos in Burgess and Green’s survey of popular YouTube videos in late 2007. “Vlogging” was said to be “an emblematic form of YouTube participation” during the early years of the platform (53). The authors’ arguments about a continuum of participation and uses of YouTube as a social medium typically took video blogs as a starting point (e.g. 56-57; “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105).

For the ‘main’ analysis further differentiation was necessary. A conceptual distinction between regular video blogs – like BLUNTY3000, BOWIECHICK, BROOKERS, MORBECK, and SMOSH – and unacknowledged fictional video blogs – like LONELYGIRL15 – is introduced in the next chapter. A table providing an overview of key data for the channels of the corpus can be found at the end of this e-book.

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

What is an audiovisual artifact?

Based on the observation that videos were created and uploaded to YouTube but rarely regarded or studied as such, this project set out to analyze YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts. It is necessary to define this term. As an audiovisual artifact I understand an object that is created through the selection, manipulation, or construction of pro-filmic settings, participants, and events; and through the use of audiovisual techniques, which comprises the use of tools for capturing and storing images and sounds²⁰ and tools for editing and other work on the recorded footage. An audiovisual artifact is created to be shown: to those who created it but mostly to others.

This definition neither distinguishes between analog and digital capture, storage, postproduction, distribution, and exhibition technologies nor between different ways of distribution and arrangements of exhibition. Such differences matter, but I suggest that a general definition of an audiovisual artifact is necessary as a starting point for studying YouTube videos not only as a self-contained audiovisual phenomenon but also in relationship with other phenomena, such as film and television productions, which would (in most cases) also classify as audiovisual artifacts.

Aspects of analysis

The aspects of analysis in this study, which also provide its overall structure, are backgrounds and motivations of the users from the corpus for using YouTube, video production, the different kinds of videos produced, functions of the body, modes of performance, the use of audiovisual techniques, the overall form of videos, and the activities of the users from the corpus and of others with regards to the videos once uploaded to the platform.

²⁰ Throughout the study I refer to these tools by the colloquial term ‘camera’ – even though a camera in the media-historical sense did not necessarily store images and did not capture and store sounds.

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

The choice of these aspects resulted from the overall endeavor of studying YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts and from the exploratory analysis which suggested that certain dimensions of users' creative activity mattered more than others. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* is still the standard work of film analysis, of studying films as audiovisual artifacts that is; and most of the aspects in view in their book are also in view here. However, the exploratory analysis indicated that the body and performance in YouTube videos were complex and rich issues that should be devoted a lot more attention to than film acting was in *Film Art* (see chapters 3.2, 3.3, and 4).

The audiovisual and web page material

For the analysis of most aspects, the videos uploaded to the channels of the corpus are in view. During the time of interest, the Flash Video player in which YouTube videos were shown on video pages had a 1.33 : 1 (i.e. 4 : 3) aspect ratio. YouTube did not change the aspect ratio of videos uploaded in another ratio when converting them to Flash files but letterboxed such videos in the player. The frame enlargements shown in this study were created from the Flash files. Accordingly, if black bands are part of frame enlargements, these stem from the uploaded audio-video files themselves (see e.g. Figs. 2.3.1-4). It appears that a few users wanted to emulate the 'look' of cinematic releases shown on 1.33 : 1 television.

Obviously, the video player showing the video was not the only element of a video page. The obligatory video title was displayed on top of the player. A box to the right displayed the user name, upload date, and the optional video description and tags. The statistical data of viewer engagement, comments and video responses were shown underneath the player. YouTube also always suggested "Related" videos for a viewer to watch – uploaded by the same user or by others – via a sidebar with thumbnail images and hyperlinks (Figs. 1.2.2-3). In the study of a few aspects, of the engagement of others with the videos from the corpus in particular, these elements of video pages, which could be called paratexts (Genette, *Paratexts* 407), come into view. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that videos were shown in this manner throughout (see also Lange, "Reciprocities and Tensions").

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

In cases in which video pages or channel pages were stored by the Internet Archive during the time of interest, these publicly archived pages instead of my privately archived live pages are used for reference. Especially in chapters 1.2 and 7 cropped screenshots of video, channel, and other YouTube pages are discussed. These screenshots were taken on a PC with a 1.33 : 1 (i.e. 4 : 3) screen on which Windows XP and a Firefox browser were running. Typically, screenshots were cropped to show the parts of the pages that are discussed only. It goes without saying that functions like search fields and buttons to click on do not retain their interactive functionality in a screenshot image. Readers are invited to imagine the interactivity of these functions when looking at screenshots.

Overall principles of the analysis

Terms and distinctions that are apt to describe and understand aspects of an arguably new phenomenon cannot be arrived at by simply looking at those that have proven fruitful in the study of other phenomena. Alexandra Schneider puts this view into practice in her study of home movies from the 1930s: Terms and distinctions are generated from the material and borrowed from elsewhere (50-51). I want to proceed in a similar inductive manner by putting the audiovisual (and other) material first.

This study may seem terribly (or refreshingly?) old-fashioned in its close attention to the material. There is a lot of making sense on a low and medium level of abstraction in my project. There is a lot of following and describing how videomakers proceeded. I suggest that this is deeply needed. There is too much free-floating theorizing in terms of fashionable arguments around in YouTube studies. There are too many big arguments with small regard for only a few videos that merely serve as an illustration of the argument (see e.g. p. 75). I suggest that an understanding of YouTube culture needs to be based on close and thorough attention to the audiovisual and web page material.

In some cases, I describe general characteristics of an aspect, for example, when suggesting that scarcity was an overall condition of YouTube video production in 2005 and 2006 (chapter 2.2). In other cases I create distinctions in the manner of taxonomies, for example in the study of editing where I distinguish between four modes of editing (chapter 5.2). Such categories and distinctions are inductively generated from the material (see e.g. next section). Nevertheless, of course

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I also discuss, borrow, and adapt categories and terms from the study of various practices throughout this study.

I illustrate findings with prime examples and briefly mention further examples. I intend to account for the commonality of findings with reference to the corpus in a general way, in the manner of: ‘The majority of users in the corpus...’ or, ‘In a few videos....’ I hope to achieve a good balance of analysis and argument.

Corporeal delivery and audiovisual delivery

In search for a ‘master’ terminology to make sense of differences between the videos of the corpus, several of the existing terminologies proved unsatisfactory. Bordwell and Thompson distinguish between “narrative,” “documentary” (“categorical” and “rhetorical”), and “experimental” (“abstract” and “associational”) form (68-72, 128-57), but the vast majority of videos would only inaccurately be described by any of these types, and for several of the types there would not be a single example in the corpus. Seymour Chatman’s trias of “narrative,” “argumentative,” and “descriptive” audiovisual “text-types” (9-11) will be used when the large-scale form of videos comes into view (chapter 6.1), but music videos cannot be covered, and the terminology did not have the kind of generality I was looking for. Both sides of Markus Kuhn’s distinction between “sprachlichem und kinematographischem bzw. audiovisuellem Erzählen im Film” – ‘lingual vs. cinematographic or audiovisual narration in film’ presuppose narration (*Filmnarratologie* 75) – which may be useful when studying fiction film but not when studying video blogs where there are also non-narrative kinds of videos (according to Kuhn’s definition of narrative) (see chapter 2.3).

Modifying Kuhn’s distinction, I distinguish between corporeal and audiovisual delivery. Virtually every video from the corpus can be situated on a continuum between these poles. Each of these types of delivery is more or less prominent in a given video, but neither of them is totally absent: A performing user (or a fictional user character) was one of the traits that were found to be characteristic of the videos uploaded by most early successful contributors of videos, and their channels and the uploaded videos became part of the corpus. Likewise, all videos are artifacts created from performances through audiovisual techniques; neither of them ‘is’ a performance, an event that only exists in the present (Umatham 233).

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

Corporeal delivery comprises the use of the voice and of the ‘rest’ of the body. In several videos corporeal delivery predominates, for example in one-shot clips in which a static camera was used, such as *Cell block Tango* on BROOKERS (Fig. 2.4.11).

Audiovisual delivery is effected through the use of audiovisual techniques. It comprises the techniques cinematography, editing, sound editing and mixing, visual effects, and titling. In several videos the use of these techniques predominates over the body. The user of the same channel extensively used all of them to create her music video *Butterfly*, and the footage of the performances seems to be mere raw matter for the creation of the actual video (see p. 275).

At the intersection of these kinds of delivery is handholding the camera while recording oneself (see p. 215). The use of settings is not covered by the heuristic – they could be regarded as the ‘background’ of a performance. This downside seemed to be defensible looking at the big advantage of the distinction’s accounting for the importance of bodies in the videos of the corpus.

David Bordwell’s ‘poetics of cinema’

Apart from *Film Art*, my overall approach of YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts is informed by Bordwell’s methodical program “poetics of cinema” (4). The term ‘poetics’ derives from the ancient Greek term *poiēsis*, which means ‘making,’ and has a long history in the theory of the arts (e.g. Aristotle’s *Poetics*). “The poetics of any artistic medium studies the finished work as the result of a process of construction” (Bordwell 12). The close analysis of audiovisual material is at the center of Bordwell’s program (19).

According to Bordwell, there are three intersecting perspectives in poetics:

A research project in poetics may be primarily analytical, studying particular devices across a range of works or in a single work. [...] Or the project can be predominantly theoretical, laying out conditions for a genre or class of work. [...]. There is also historical poetics, the effort to understand how artworks assume certain forms within a period or across periods. Usually, any project will involve all three perspectives, but one or another will predominate. (13)

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

The analytical perspective is prominent in my study, while I also relate video blogs to historical and contemporary cultural forms, and forge and appropriate theoretical concepts to understand video blogs.

Bordwell proposes the study of “particulars, patterns, purposes, principles, practices, and processing” of films. The “particulars that attract our attention can seem either unique to the film or something, perhaps even something trivial, that it shares with other films;” they may “belong to patterns” (24).

Particulars and patterns are fulfilling functions, “[a]nd it goes without saying that anything we pick out may be serving many functions, and several devices may be working in harmony to achieve one overall purpose” (24). Bordwell understands filmmaking “in terms of problems and solutions.” A filmmaker aims to achieve an “effect” and “contrives a way to achieve the effect he or she wants” (25). In some cases, “filmmakers will acknowledge the purposes that their strategies fulfill, but more often we have to posit some plausible ones ourselves” (24).

In *Poetics of Cinema* and *Film Art* the term “devices” is used for tactics that involve one or several audiovisual techniques and that are used to achieve one or more effects. Long takes, deep-space staging (*Poetics* 14), the “ticking clock” (25), shot/reverse shot (58), and a non-diegetic narrator (*Film Art* 86) are examples of devices in film. In my study of YouTube videos I ask which devices were common on the channels of the corpus and for which purposes they were used.

The next ‘p’ of the terminology is “principle,” which brings Bordwell to the issue of “norms” and “conventions.” Typically,

principles will be in the nature of norms, those explicit or implicit guidelines that shape creative action. [...] [C]onventions are central subjects for poetics, and we can think of norms as the principles that govern conventions. Some norms operate at the small scale, whereas others shape the formal design of whole films. Sometimes norms are formulated as crisp rules, but most often they are rules of thumb and operate in the background, learned and applied without explanation or even awareness. (Filmmakers know a great deal more about their activity than they articulate.) We’re often left to infer the relevant norms by noting regularities and then seeking out evidence that could count for or against. (25)

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Particularly informing in the study of conventions are users' reflections about YouTube videomaking, for example videos in which users remark: 'Everybody is doing...' (see e.g. 241). If devices are taught we are entering the realm of explicit norms and of conventionalization. YouTube tutorials – such as the video *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube* by the user of BLUNTY3000 (introduced p. 69) – are an important benchmark for the emergence of video blogging as a practice with constitutive conventions.

Filmmakers are “operating within institutions that offer both constraints and opportunities. These factors can be summed up under the rubric of practices” (28). Bordwell offers two ideas for understanding practices:

First, there is a rational agent model of creativity. [...] [T]he filmmaker selects among constructional options or creates new choices. [...] The rationality at stake is largely one of means-end reasoning. [...] A second, institutional dimension of practice forms the horizon of what is permitted and encouraged at particular moments. The filmmaker works, most proximately, within a social and economic system of production, and this involves tacit aesthetic assumptions, some division of labor, and standard ways of using technology. [...] It's not just that the filmmaker's choices are constrained; they are also actively constituted in large part by socially structured factors of this sort. [...] In most sorts of filmmaking, practices are crystallized in routine ways of doing things. (28-29)

Examples of practices would be “the Hollywood studio system of the 1920s and 1930s,” contemporary Hollywood cinema, Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s (28-29), and (European) “art cinema” of the 1950s and 1960s (151). Throughout this study, I argue that video blogging emerged as a cultural and – more specifically – as an audiovisual practice in 2005 and 2006.

The final p-term is “processing” and largely refers to Bordwell's own “cognitive” perspective of an audience's uptake of a film (41). Because reception, in Bordwell's sense, is not within the scope of this project, “processing” is not relevant here.

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The term 'poetics' puts an emphasis on 'making': It conveys the notion that in order for the YouTube videos of the corpus to come into being, users did something. Users' 'making' comprised the creation of content and form of videos while these two dimensions are of course inextricably linked.

Individual creativity and the emergence of video blogging

The videos from the corpus were produced and uploaded by individuals and a few small groups of people collaborating offline (see 2.1 Who are you?). Thus activities of these individuals and small groups should be the starting point for thinking about creative decision-making.

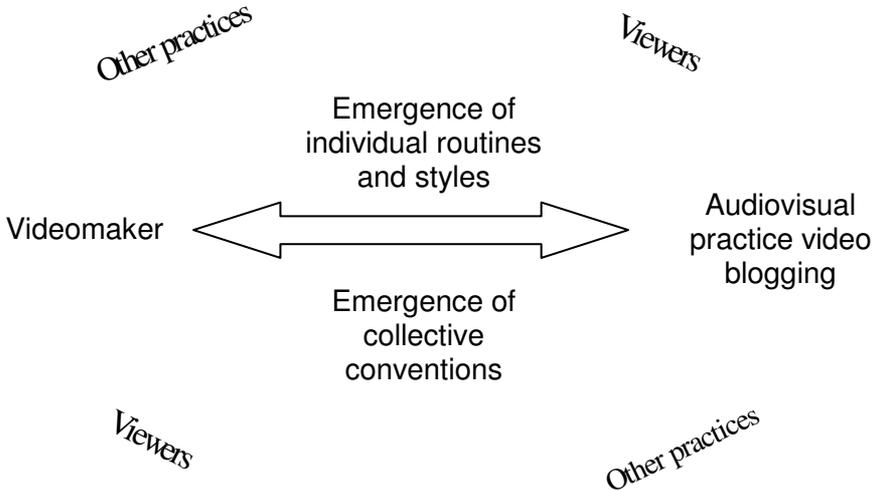
Informed by Bordwell's poetics, several questions can be asked:

- Which choice did a user make facing a particular situation or problem while making a video (Bordwell 25)?
- Which patterns of choices (i.e. routines) can be found in the videos of the corpus (24)?
- Is it possible to trace the 'migration' of choices and patterns of choices from one user channel to others?
- What is the scope of patterns? Some may be common only in particular kinds of videos, others common across a range of videos (16, 26).
- Which choices appear to be the result of conventions (i.e. of implicit or explicit norms) (25)?
- How do choices, patterns, and conventions of video blogging relate to those of other practices (22, 26)?
- Did users develop individual styles within video blogging (19)?

The upload of the first video to YouTube on April 23, 2005 (JAWED, *Me at the zoo*, see p. 229) can be theorized as the starting point of two interdependent processes: The emergence of individual routines and styles and the emergence of collective conventions for using YouTube. In both processes individual video contributors and emerging practices interacted. Conventions of existing (i.e. 'off-YouTube') practices and, not the least, the popularity of certain videos with viewers on YouTube conditioned these processes.

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

The following schematic was the result of my long engagement with the videos of the corpus, but it should be presented here because it conceptualizes these interdependent processes with regards to video blogging and thus informs the reader of the following analytical chapters (Fig. 1.4.1):



1.4.1 The interdependent emergences of individual routines and styles and of collective conventions.

Singular choices of a videomaker could become routines if repeated in further videos and lead to patterns in videos. The choices and routines of an individual could be recognized and copied by others and thus become collective routines. Recognition and reflection of routines of videomaking and patterns in videos as such and normative statements attest to the emergence of conventions.

Of course YouTube users did not start using the service as clean slates but as experienced viewers (and in several cases also as producers) of audiovisual artifacts in other contexts. Contesting the "romantic misconception of users' 'authentic creativity,'" Eggo Müller points out that "[a]ll users are without any exception part of already existing cultures and have to work through these cultures' norms and conventions to develop their own creative interests and skills" ("Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video" 137). At the same

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

time, users' decisions were situated within – and thus “constrained” and “constituted” by (Bordwell 28) – the emerging practice video blogging. Individual creative acts were at once forming and being formed by conventions. It will be interesting to see which framing – YouTube or wider contexts – yield the more convincing results in the case of a given choice of a videomaker, and which contexts: Industry practice and everyday creativity are common framings used thus far, but as I am going to show, things are more complex and interesting (see e.g. chapter 5.2).

Speaking of the history of cinema, Bordwell regards those devices as inventions that were not technologically determined and that had no parallels in other media (58). However, an “innovative reworking or recombination of familiar elements” – on the level of the individual videomaker or the collective – can also be regarded as a creative achievement of course (Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 38; see also Negus and Pickering 68).

With the increasing conventionalization of video blogging, individual routines and styles were not necessarily assimilated. On the contrary, stylistic differentiation within the practice became possible and – if we take competition for viewers into the equation – also necessary. Routines and styles made videos from individual users recognizable and facilitated viewer dedication.

At the same time, contributing users and their viewers wanted variety. Users' creative interests could change. In the same manner as they did not show up from nowhere, users could move on to create audiovisual artifacts for other outlets. On the level of the audiovisual practice at large, the formation of conventions was no end point either. New users, new routines, and new conventions could emerge. It is also possible to think of a dissolution or displacement of video blogging by other practices – even though this would be way beyond the time of interest.

The video blog as a cultural form that comprises different kinds of videos

In this study, I argue that the video blog was a cultural form that emerged in interplay with the emerging practice video blogging on YouTube in 2005 and 2006. As a cultural form I understand a body of interdependent traits of cultural artifacts. The term ‘cultural form’ is used in literary, film, and media studies in diverse manners, consider

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

the titles of these publications: *Serious play: the cultural form of the nineteenth-century realist novel* (Franklin) and “Music Video: Industrial Product, Cultural Form” (Laing). The classical Hollywood movie would also be a cultural form (e.g. Hansen 64, 67). Because videos were the prime manifestations of the cultural form video blog, it was at the same time an audiovisual form. An important working hypothesis for the analysis was that the video blog was a cultural form with certain traits, which, however, comprised various kinds of videos that were produced by the same user (see 1.3 Corpus Formation). The use of the term thus also provides a starting point to describe the formations that existed below the level of the video blog and which I refer to as ‘kinds of videos’ (see chapter 2.3).

Regular video blogs and unacknowledged fictional video blogs

A distinction between regular video blogs and unacknowledged fictional video blogs – those popularly referred to as ‘fakes’ – makes sense not because the first were authentic, amateur, and non-commercial, and the latter inauthentic, professional, and commercial: The analysis of backgrounds and motivations of the users from the corpus (see chapter 2.1) and of the interplay of modes of performance in the videos of most of them (see chapters 4.1 and 4.2) confounds these dichotomies.

On regular video blogs there was a personal union of performing, producing, and uploading. On unacknowledged fictional video blogs such a configuration was emulated. Such channels were meant to pass as regular video blogs. Unacknowledged fictional video blogs are best understood as constructed regular video blogs within an additional and unacknowledged frame. Differentiating between these channels is primarily possible through secondary sources.

Nevertheless, the video analysis will show that the makers of unacknowledged fictional vlogs did not ‘copy’ regular vlogs in an uncomplicated way. They copied some characteristics, they heightened or transformed others, and they also ignored some characteristics. At different times in this study, I will point to differences between the vlogs within-the-frame on unacknowledged fictional vlogs and regular vlogs.

Unacknowledged fictional vlogs are an exception in the corpus; and in most instances the focus is on regular vlogs. Accordingly, unless regular and unacknowledged fictional vlogs are contrastingly discus-

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sed, 'video blog' (or 'vlog') without a qualifier is used to refer to regular video blogs in the following chapters.

'Vlogger' refers to a user running a regular vlog. 'Vlogger character' refers to a fictional vlogger enactment presented on either type of vlogs. The people responsible for performance, production, and upload on unacknowledged fictional vlogs are not referred to as vloggers but – depending on the tasks they fulfilled in the project – as performers or users running a project respectively.²¹

'YouTube user' is a general term for YouTube account holders in this study, including those who contributed videos (video bloggers, the people running unacknowledged fictional vlogs, and other contributors) and those who only used their accounts to watch, comment, rate, subscribe, etc. 'Internet user' is meant to also include visitors of YouTube: people that did not have and open a YouTube account.

Were unacknowledged fictional video blogs part of the audiovisual practice video blogging? In the following chapters, it will become clear that the answer depends on the perspective taken and on the aspect and time in view. Discussing this question any further would go beyond the scope of a methodical chapter. Because the situatedness of these channels in or vis-à-vis video blogging is complex, qualifiers like 'regular' and 'unacknowledged' for 'video blogging' are not called for. The focus is on regular vlogs in most instances, thus 'video blogging' typically refers to the activities of vloggers (i.e. to 'regular video blogging').

An epistemological dilemma?

Isn't there the danger that all YouTube channels of 2005 and 2006 were set-ups like the notorious LONELYGIRL15? Shouldn't every statement that involves assumptions about how and by whom a video was produced be put into scare quotes? In a few instances I faced such doubtful questions when speaking about my project in its initial stages. Such skepticism is also common in some of the more popular YouTube literature (e.g. Andrew Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur*). Con-

²¹ While a personal union of performing, producing, and uploading characterized the vlog-within-the-frame on unacknowledged fictional vlogs, such a union did not necessarily also exist in the framing situation of production (see pp. 71-72 and 192-193).

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fronting these questions may be necessary as a preparation for the following chapters.

Looking at the exceptionally high amount of attention LONELYGIRL15 has received – taking into account that there were similarly successful YouTube channels at the time (see table Channels of the Corpus) – there can be no doubt that ‘fakes’ are attractive topics in research and other texts. The other commonly-discussed YouTube ‘fake’ is *Al Gore’s Penguin Army*, an animated video that parodied *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore’s documentary about global warming. According to the information provided on the video page, *Al Gore’s Penguin Army* was an independent production by a 29-year-old man from Beverly Hills who chose TOUTSMITH as a user name and uploaded the video on May 24, 2006. Investigations by *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that an Email sent to the user was responded to “from a computer registered to DCI Group, a Washington D.C. public relations and lobbying firm whose clients include oil company Exxon Mobil Corp.” (Regalado and Searcey). It is now widely believed that video was part of a lobbying campaign against legislation to halt global warming – rather than the product of an ‘ordinary’ citizen voicing his disagreement with Gore’s film.

There is no reason, however, to categorically negate all production claims in YouTube videos, on video and channel pages on the grounds of the tiny number of these attractive fakes. There are three more ‘fakes’ – or unacknowledged fictional video blogs – in the corpus: DANIELBEAST, which also belongs to the LONELYGIRL15 project, and EMOKID21OHIO and LITTLELOCA. Like in the cases of the other examples, evidence about the real contexts of production was found by viewers and news media within weeks and the real producers stepped forward acknowledging the fictionality of the vlogger characters (see p. 181). Accordingly, claims about production in the videos, in video descriptions, and on channel pages are regarded as elements of the fictional diegetic world in my project. However, for the vast majority of channels there simply is no indication that who claims to have produced the videos did not actually produce them. On the contrary: There are a variety of sources that confirm such claims (see next chapter).

The fundamental objection, as we might call it, invites further attention. The first variant that I encountered, in face-to-face discussions in particular, seemed to be a version of what we might call “postmodernist skepticism,” borrowing a term used by Noël Carroll in a different context (283). A selective reading of Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and*

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Simulation could make us believe that all ways of gaining knowledge about the world were equally flawed and futile; we could stop at this ‘insight’ and repeat it over and over again. Especially in the 1990s it was popular to regard the Internet as the ultimate confirmation of Baudrillard’s theory of simulation,²² but this view is overly simplistic – if not altogether wrong – and politically dubious: If what is out there on the net bore no relationship with our lives, all cases of cyberbullying, Facebook parties gone wrong, and criminal investigations relying on IP data would be mere illusions – and they are not.

The second variant of the fundamental objection employs the rare yet oft-mentioned ‘fakes’ in support of a conservative and culturally-pessimist argument. The most-prominent proponent of this variety is Andrew Keen who argues that “the real consequence of the Web 2.0 revolution is less culture, less reliable news, and a chaos of useless information. One chilling reality in this brave new digital epoch is the blurring, obfuscation, and even disappearance of truth” (16). As “proof” Keen presents the case of the AI Gore video (16). After writing about LONELYGIRL15 he claims: “We’re never sure if what we read or see is what it seems” (79). Significantly, about half of the actual YouTube videos Keen mentions in *The Cult of the Amateur* are ‘fakes.’ He ignores the vast majority of cases in which there simply is no mystery to be solved, no grand illusion to be countered, and no ‘hidden truth’ to be revealed.

Underlying the fundamental objection – especially of the second variant –, appear to be two assumptions. The first assumption is that cultural artifacts that ‘lie’ about their production are a novel issue or one that is specific to the Internet age. Of course this is not the case: Forged documents were very common in the Middle Ages, probably more common than today, and already at that time methods of exposing such ‘fakes’ were developed; and who would want to forget the pop duo Milli Vanilli who moved their lips to lyrics recorded by other singers in the late 1980s? The second underlying assumption is that we know how other cultural artifacts came into being. However, the truth is, we don’t know, because we were not present at the time and place of production. All the assumptions we cherish about how an artifact came into being and by whom it was produced rely on our engagements with the cultural artifact itself and with further sources.

²² See Bell (14–16) for an overview.

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Like a film or television program, the audiovisual material itself gives some indication about the production process. Audiovisual analysis implies or explicates assumptions about production. We can say quite a bit about settings and profilmic events, cinematography, editing, and sound without having been present at production and without relying on secondary sources (see Bordwell 24-25).

Users make statements about the production of their videos during the profilmic presentation, in title sequences, in video descriptions, and on channel pages. Some of them are also willing to talk about their work and respond to Emails.²³

Secondary sources about YouTube channels and videos are created by other YouTube users, by journalists, and by researchers. Viewers of LONELYGIRL15 videos voiced initial doubts about their 'authenticity' in comments and were ultimately able to link the project to the Creative Artists Agency (p. 71). All of the channels of the corpus are treated by one or several news media sources which provide the full names of the users and information about their private and creative backgrounds. A couple of channels are mentioned or discussed in the YouTube research.²⁴ Naturally, the research literature about YouTube channels and videos is not as prolific as that about mainstream television or Hollywood productions, but still, we have a number of sources to refer to.

A critical engagement with cultural artifacts and with secondary sources is good practice in the humanities. This involves negotiating conflicting claims. The cultural artifact itself and secondary sources are imbued with the interests of those who produced and distributed them.²⁵ Writing about YouTube videos – not only about their production – requires the same critical awareness and self-reflexiveness that is required when writing about other kinds of artifacts.

²³ In individual cases, and with mixed results, I sent a user an Email if I had a specific question (see e.g. p. 354).

²⁴ See e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 29; Christian; and Sørenssen 140.

²⁵ Only on a first glance, for example, do the closing credits of a Hollywood film appear to provide an unproblematic account of who has been important for the movie to come into being. The structure of credits is the result of negotiations between the film industry, unions, and guilds. Still, disputes are common, for example when a script undergoes a complex rewriting process and not all of the screenwriters are credited (Bordwell and Thompson 25, 31)

Choosing channels for close analysis and illustration

In the following chapters I deal with some channels more than with others: A close analysis of performance and audiovisual techniques could not have been conducted for all the videos in the corpus. Such a study would have been incredibly long, unreadable, while not necessarily providing better insights. Writing about different aspects of the same channels in different chapters also seemed necessary in order not to confuse readers who would not be as familiar with the corpus as myself. What I will do, is to transparently set out how I chose channels for close analysis and to pick out key examples for illustrative purposes.

I started off with two hypotheses for creating this core corpus of channels. The first hypothesis was that certain channels were more central in the overall corpus than others because

- of their comparatively high success also with reference to other successful channels,
- of their conspicuous influence for other channels in terms of the aspects in view of this study, or because
- they were frequently referred to by other users.

The second hypothesis was that channels which offered reflection about vlogging or YouTube in general were worth studying in detail.

Accordingly, I focus on the following eight channels, which constitute the core corpus of this study:

- SMOSH, BROOKERS, and LONELYGIRL15 because they appeared in more than one version of the ranking and on a top position,
- BOWIECHICK and THEWINEKONE, because they were conspicuously influential for other users and frequently referred to in their videos, and
- BLUNTY3000, MORBECK, and RENETTO because of the reflection about YouTube culture they offered.

At times I refer to users or individual YouTube videos that are not part of the corpus. YouTube culture is vibrant and complex, and any methodology has blind spots that should be compensated for in one way or another. For example, because the corpus consists of most subscribed channels, many one-hit viral videos are not part of it. Such

1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis

videos are occasionally mentioned in the videos of the corpus and thus seem to be important within YouTube video culture at the time, so I take them into view in the study of certain aspects. At times it is also necessary to point beyond 2005 and 2006. FRED and ITSCHRIS-CROCKER, for example, are more recent YouTube channels that were influenced by the channels of the corpus. Typically, however, the focus is on the channels of the core corpus. Videos from other channels of the corpus (and beyond) are mentioned as further examples, while they are not normally discussed in detail.

I saved all video pages including the video files of the core corpus channels and of several other corpus channels onto hard disk in 2010. I had saved individual pages and videos already in 2009. I saved further video pages and videos of the corpus and beyond when they became the object of analysis.

The disappearance of YouTube channels and videos is an ongoing but uneven process. Since archiving, none of the 28 channels of the corpus has become unavailable but several videos have. In some of these cases, videos can still be publicly accessed on the Internet Archive (e.g. MORBECK, *The Cat fight*). A list of all YouTube videos referred to in the study can be found at the end of this e-book. In chapter 2.1 the channels of the core corpus and the users running these channels are introduced.

2 Users, Video Production, and Kinds of Videos

This chapter is in many ways a response to the gap in the YouTube research thus far of thoroughly studying video production. It also responds to downplaying YouTube videomaking as a mode of audiovisual production and of regarding it as a mere means for social networking instead (e.g. Burgess and Green 26). I am going to show that contributors of YouTube videos who turned out to be successful in the early days of the platform identified as audiovisual producers, and that they, in a very straightforward fashion, simply were such producers. A fundamental motivation for using YouTube – which refuses to be reduced to anything else – was showing one’s videos.

An introduction of the users from the core corpus, an exploration of their creative and media backgrounds, and a discussion of their motivations for using the service seem to be necessary for everything else to come (2.1). I am going to pose three arguments about video production for YouTube in 2005 and 2006 that will be supported throughout the rest of the study (2.2) The most important kinds of videos that video bloggers produced will be introduced in the third part (2.3). Finally, I am going to trace how video bloggers understood and organized production as a process in which different tasks related to and depended on each other (2.4). Indeed, video blogging emerged as an audiovisual practice.

2.1 Who are you?

The channels of the core corpus

The channel **BROOKERS** was opened on September 30, 2005 – at a time, when YouTube was still in public beta and had not attracted mainstream media news.²⁶ The vlogger, who introduced herself as

²⁶ It seems that the first mainstream media reference to YouTube is an article in *The New York Times* that introduced several video platforms on Oct. 27 (Kirsner).

2.1 Who are you?

Brooke in videos and on her channel page, created comedy videos and music videos of various sorts (see table Channels of the Corpus). While such categorizations may be necessary, they fail to account for the raw energy and fervor of her performance which seems to have been at the heart of her style of vlogging (Figs. 2.1.1-2).

In June 2006 she hit the news as “the first talent to emerge, in an official capacity, from the online service” YouTube. Television producer Carson Daly had signed her to produce “content for TV, Internet and mobile outlets” (Martin). During the next months she would be seen on YouTube and the NBC-sponsored website *Its Your Show TV*. As a part of the coverage, she was ‘revealed’ to be 19-year-old Brooke Brodack from Massachusetts (McGrath).



2.1.1-2 Brooke Brodack in *Im special* [sic] and *Cell block Tango*.

When Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla opened their **SMOSH** YouTube channel in November 2005, they had been running smosh.com for three years. This website – “Your Source for Everything Cool” – offered Internet and computer culture news, discussion, user-created Flash animations and other videos. At least since November 2003 they were running advertisements on the site. They hit the mark of 1000 registered users in the same month (Internet Archive, 27 Nov. 2003). The first couple of SMOSH YouTube videos were all uploaded on the same day and had been posted on smosh.com before (Internet Archive, 30 Oct. 2005). The vloggers consistently linked to their own website in opening titles and video descriptions, to the site where they could benefit from ad revenues before revenue sharing was introduced to YouTube in 2007. They introduced themselves with their full names in opening titles (Figs. 2.1.3-4).

2.1 Who are you?

Hecox and Padilla created music videos for theme songs from children's television shows and video games from the 1980s and 1990s (Figs. 2.1.3-4) before specializing in sketch comedy videos. At the same time as the SMOSH channel, they opened IANH which they used to show behind-the-scenes clips of an open-ended *A Day in the Life of Smosh* series and other videos. Together with BROOKERS, SMOSH is the consistently highest-ranking channel in the corpus: it appears on 1, 2, and 2 of the archived rankings (see table Channels of the Corpus).

Like Brodack, Hecox and Padilla received news coverage as early successful YouTube videomakers who received offers of various kinds. They were reported to be 18-year-olds bearing the names they had been using all along who lived in a suburb of Sacramento, California. Interestingly, their semi-professional pre-YouTube background did not feature in these news reports: They “were just having fun when they started” their YouTube activities and only then “translated their fame into a business: a website where they sell T-shirts” (Kornblum, “YouTube Launches Its Own Web Stars”).



2.1.3-4 Anthony Padilla and Ian Hecox illustrate a gong sound effect and a panting warrior in the first two shots of *Mortal Kombat Theme*, a music video for theme music of a video game.

The channel **THEWINEKONE** was opened on December 17. In the first video the vlogger introduced himself as Tony Huynh in opening titles and during his profilmic presentation. *The Delaware Boy* and three other videos were all uploaded on the same day, while he provided dates between November 11 and December 5 in closing titles, which suggests that they were released on another platform before; accord-

2.1 Who are you?

ing to Huynh, this platform was Google Video (“Re: Your early YouTube activities”).

After assorted short documentaries that explored his local environment – for example the ‘haunted’ forest near his home (Fig. 2.1.5) – Huynh began creating diarist videos and rants about life and YouTube video culture featuring himself sitting in front of the computer “talking to the camera,” for example *Internet Recognition* (Fig. 2.1.6).

On LONELYGIRL15 and BLUNTY3000 he was mentioned as a favorite vlogger. Like the other vloggers mentioned thus far, Huynh became a “YouTube Partner” when the ad revenue sharing scheme was introduced in 2007 (“Tony Huynh”).



2.1.5-6 Tony Huynh introduces himself in *The Delaware Boy* – and illustrates the “weirdness” of getting attention from girls in *Internet Recognition*.

The main contribution of the vlogger running the channel **BOWIECHICK**, who joined YouTube on January 4, 2006, were public diary clips: videos in which she talked about activities in and after school, and offline friends who sometimes had a guest appearance in her videos. She also created a several music videos. In *First Videoblog* she introduced herself as Melody (Fig. 2.1.7). News reports later mentioned her surname Oliveria (Kreiser). She received a lot of attention on YouTube and some in the press (Sandoval, “YouTube’s ‘Bowiechick’ and the Spiders From Marketing”) for her use of a visual effect that used face tracking to superimpose a cartoon image of a diving mask, various beards, John Lennon glasses, or a gas mask onto her face. In *Breakup* she first used the effect (Fig. 2.1.8).

2.1 Who are you?



2.1.7-8 “Hello, my name is Melody;” the vlogger introduces herself in *First Videoblog*. Face-tracked matte in *Breakup*.

The vlogger running the channel **RENETTO** started off his YouTube activities with a series of reviews of videos by successful vloggers and of individual viral videos (Fig. 2.1.9). For these videos he performed as the “Renetto character,” a man with a speech impediment. He would go on creating self/world documentaries (Fig. 2.1.10) and other videos (see 2.3 Kinds of Videos in detail). In seriously-toned autobiographical videos he introduced himself as 39-year-old Paul Robinett, an “inventor,” who had an artistic/entrepreneurial history in painting, photography, video making, and designing lawn chairs and candles (*How to become SELF UNEMPLOYED!*).



2.1.9-10 Frames from *Proving Science Wrong! Renetto Reviews* and *Renetto goes TANNING*.

2.1 Who are you?

The owner of the channel **BLUNTY3000** initially used YouTube as a new outlet for his Lego stop-motion animation (Fig. 2.1.11), for videos he had been releasing on his website Bluntmation.com at least since 2002. Some of these videos had also been shown on festivals like the International Trickfilm Festival in Stuttgart and on the European television network Arte.²⁷

His first live action video *Vblog – how to be popular on youtube*, uploaded in June 2006 (Fig. 2.1.12), was a success after which he produced more such videos. In most of these videos he spoke about topics of YouTube video culture and beyond, but he also uploaded public diary clips. In late 2006 he began reviewing gaming consoles, mobile devices, and cameras.

On his website and later on YouTube he used the nicknames BLUNTY3000, Blunty, but also Nate Burr which was later reported to be his real name. Unlike the American vloggers previously introduced, Burr lived in Tasmania, Australia. Like most of the other vloggers from the core corpus, he became one of the first users YouTube selected to participate in the revenue sharing program in 2007 (Burr, Interview by Tim Burrowes).



2.1.11-12 *Natural Enemy - Bluntmation*: A video released on Bluntmation.com in 2002 and later on YouTube. Nate Burr in his first live action video *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*.

²⁷ See Bluntmation.com at the Internet Archive on Nov. 18, 2003 and Feb. 14, 2006 (Burr).

2.1 Who are you?

The vlogger running the channel **MORBECK** started his YouTube activities with a series of parodic performances of popular vloggers. He then performed as Chipmunk Chick, a fictional vlogger character he came up with (Fig. 2.1.13). Further characters, like Chipmunk Chick's personal assistant Alicia (Fig. 2.1.14) and her mother Trixie Love, were added to the Chipmunk Chick story world and all played by himself. In occasional "me being me" performances he referred to himself as Pedro Morbeck, a Brazilian who had spent time in the United States during high school (*To the fans and haters*). He used the same name when responding to an Email I sent him.



2.1.13-14 "The truth is: I think you're trying to steal the spotlight from me." / "That is bullshit." Chipmunk Chick and her assistant Alicia in subsequent shots of *The Cat fight*.



2.1.15 "I'm sure you girls can talk this out. [...] So please chill out." Pedro Morbeck as himself in another shot from *The Cat fight*: a performer/videomaker troubled by the characters he created.

2.1 Who are you?

Like performances of fictional characters on other regular video blogs – and unlike those on unacknowledged fictional vlogs like LONELYGIRL15 – the status of Morbeck’s performances was acknowledged throughout. Chipmunk Chick videos were not meant to pass as the productions of the character (see chapter 4.2, pp. 179-182).

Two mashup videos uploaded to LONELYGIRL15 which quoted material from various regular video blogs – BOWIECHICK, BROOKERS, MORBECK, and THEWINEKONE of the core corpus – created a connection with YouTube’s video culture and set the stage for the first appearance of the character Bree in *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*, a video released on June 16, 2006 (Fig. 2.1.16). Bree introduced herself as a 16-year-old home-schooled girl living in a “boring” town. She attributed “setting up” her “account” and the “cool editing tricks” in her videos to “Daniel.” The repetitive but enigmatic references to Daniel were obviously meant to prompt questions from viewers about his identity and if he was her boyfriend. Daniel was first shown in *The Danielbeast* as her best friend – his romantic intentions were revealed later. When their relationship became more complex, Daniel ‘opened’ the channel DANIELBEAST to create video responses to Bree’s videos (Fig. 2.1.17). Like Hecox and Padilla’s second channel IANH, DANIELBEAST is not part of the core corpus but of the overall corpus.



2.1.16-17 *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* on LONELYGIRL15 and *Daniel Responds* on DANIELBEAST.

Public diary clips, self/world ‘documentaries,’ and subject clips were primarily uploaded to LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST. Over time, the thematic focus shifted from the everyday to a mystery surrounding The Order, a cult Bree’s family was involved with.

2.1 Who are you?

Doubts about Bree's and Daniel's professed identities and claims of producing the videos and running the channels grew slowly (Christian; Flemming). Viewers with technical expertise were able to track LONELYGIRL15 to an IP at the Creative Artists Agency in Beverly Hills in September 2006. Shortly thereafter "Miles Beckett, 28, a Web-obsessed medical school dropout; Mesh Flinders, 26, a screenwriter; and Greg Goodfried, a 27-year-old lawyer" stepped forward and revealed that they were running the channels and producing the videos (Rushfield and Hoffman, "Lonelygirl15 Video Blog is Brainchild of 3 Filmmakers"). LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST were a fictional web series in which Bree and Daniel were played by Jessica Rose and Yousef Abu-Taleb, two obscure actors. The producers continued producing and uploading videos, acknowledging the fictionality on channel pages later on.

Users' creative and media backgrounds

YouTube did not screen users during the process of registration for having a particular creative or industry background. The service was free to use for all Internet users. In news reports this translated into the perception of a platform used by, indeed, "everyone" (Heffernan, "Now Playing on YouTube: Web Videos by Everyone") or by "fabulous nobodies" who created a following without previous expertise or connections to other areas of media making (Reuters, "YouTube Gives Voice to Fabulous Nobodies"). Users did not mind and even played along with these narratives – even if, for example in the case of SMOSH, things were more complex (see previous section). At the end of 2006 the Web 2.0 and YouTube crazes culminated in *TIME*'s declaration of "You" as the "Person of the Year [...] for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game." YouTube was referred to as a "million-channel people's network" as a part of the coverage (Grossman).

Burgess and Green, like many others, argue that YouTube needs to be contextualized within a "changing media environment" of the 2000s "where the practices and identities associated with cultural production and consumption, commercial and non-commercial enterprise, and professionalism and amateurism interact and converge in new ways" (*YouTube* 90). YouTube's position with regards to the relationship between amateurism and professionalism is a particularly prominent

2.1 Who are you?

topic in the research: Is YouTube a platform used by amateurs and/or professionals? Does it signal a new relationship between amateurs and professionals, or new understandings of these terms? Does YouTube video culture challenge the validity of the distinction in general?

However, a problem seems to be that it is never clear what these terms mean to begin with: When talking about amateurism and professionalism – and how YouTube may or may not signal or propel changes in this regard – scholars mean quite different things, sometimes different things at the same time. Taking the previous introduction of the core corpus as a starting point, I want to briefly list the different uses of ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ in the YouTube research in order to situate early successful contributors of YouTube videos – video bloggers and the users running unacknowledged fictional vlogs – in terms of their creative and media backgrounds when beginning to use the platform. This will also serve to gain tentative insights into what may or may not have changed in the 2000s with reference to these two worlds. While the focus will remain on the channels of the core corpus, a couple of further channels from the overall corpus will also come into view.

Different issues intersect when ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ are used in the research literature:

- users’ skills of audiovisual production (or of other skills relevant to their YouTube activities) (e.g. Lange, “(Mis)conceptions” 90);
- whether or not users enjoyed formal training that was relevant to their YouTube activities (e.g. Lange 90);
- whether or not they were pursuing similar activities as a career (Lange 91; Reichert 215);
- content creation and distribution with or without a financial motivation (Burgess and Green 54-55; Lessig 254-255; Strangelove 182);
- content creation within or outside the established media industries (Strangelove 14; Burgess and Green 39);
- whether or not users were famous (Lange 89-90; Strangelove 187);

and furthermore:

- the creation of different lines of products by manufacturers of cameras and other equipment (Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 25–26);

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- judgments about the quality of a video: if it is “good” or “bad” (e.g. Juhasz, “YouTube is Home to the Formal Divide”);
- a distinction between publicly and privately circulated videos (e.g. Buckingham 25; Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 13; Strangelove 16).

Fortunately, with regards to users’ background when joining YouTube, only the first couple of issues need to concern us here.

The users running several channels of the core corpus – BROOKERS, BOWIECHICK, and MORBECK – did not have previous experience in the production of audiovisual artifacts. In the cases of these users the most-dramatic development of **skills** can be observed (see also Lange 90). More remarkable, however, is the extent to which people with experience in this regard began using YouTube well before the YouTube media frenzy of summer 2006, already during the first 12 months of operation between April 2005 to March 2006 which was the time when SMOSH, BLUNTY3000, and RENETTO were started. Already at the very beginning YouTube was welcomed and used by people with experience in audiovisual production.

Widening the scope to include skills beyond those of audiovisual production, we need to acknowledge that most users that turned out to be successful had a combination of performer skills and socialization in Web 2.0 culture when they began using YouTube. It is difficult to actually pin down performer skills, but early clips on BROOKERS and MORBECK show a heightened awareness of the recording agency, a willingness to interact with this agency, and knowledge of cultural codes of performance from movies, music videos, and newscast. YouTube’s would-be successful video contributors also tended to be active on other Web 2.0 platforms: Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) and Pedro Morbeck were running text blogs before starting to use YouTube; Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) was an active user of MySpace when she opened her channel. Hecox and Padilla (SMOSH) were even running their own small Web 2.0 platform: smosh.com. While valuing the agency provided by YouTube to “[e]veryone” (Heffernan), we need to take into account that those that would become successful on the platform had a number of skills that gave them an advantage over the masses of other users.

In the core corpus there do not seem to be users that enjoyed **formal training** that was relevant to their YouTube activities. If we widen the scope to also include the other channels of the corpus, two

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users come into view that did enjoy such training. When Lital Tasha Mizel opened TASHA in August 2005, she was training to become a film and television editor. Some of her early YouTube videos are also course assignments (see video description of *Mad World*). While she never graduated, the folk musician Terra Naomi (TERRANAOMI) previously studied classical singing at the School of Music of the University of Michigan. After extensive touring and several demos, her “Virtual Summer Tour” on YouTube in 2006 – a series of musical performance videos recorded in a domestic setting – lead to a lot of popular and media attention and a deal with Island Records (Naomi, “The story so far...”).

Burgess and Green criticize the news media’s narration of user biographies in terms of “DIY celebrity”: “Even when ordinary people become celebrities through their own creative efforts, there is no necessary transfer of media power: they remain within the system of celebrity native to, and controlled by, the mass media” (22-3). Nevertheless, the authors do not challenge the validity of the stories themselves: TASHA’s *Hey clip* is presented both as an example of “DIY celebrity” and of “vernacular creativity” (26). The latter term refers to Burgess and Green’s idea of “mundane and formerly private forms” that have increasingly become “part of public culture” (13). The fact that Mizel was going to “editing school” (*Mad World*) goes unnoticed. The story of Terra Naomi who “secured a recording contract after becoming one of the most-subscribed artists on YouTube” is also simply reiterated without any mention of her previous professional training and ambitions (22).

The question of whether or not users had a professional background in terms of **pursuing a career** with similar activities (Lange 91) overlaps with the issues of formal training and of a financial motivation, while a person may in fact be pursuing a career without formal training and, especially in the early stages, without receiving money. Apart from Paul Robinett (RENETTO), Mesh Flinders and Jessica Rose (LONELYGIRL15), and perhaps Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla (SMOSH) from the core corpus, and Lital Mizel (TASHA) and Terra Naomi from the wider corpus, further users can be mentioned here. Stevie Ryan and Lisa Donovan – the producer/performers of LITTLELOCA and LISANOVA – were trying to get a foot into acting and modeling in Los Angeles (McGrath; Wallenstein). Mysto and Pizzi (MYSTOANDPIZZI)

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were professional hip hop producers who were already producing records for several signed recording artists like Nina Sky and Cassie when they joined YouTube in March 2006.²⁸

Characteristic of these users – probably with the exception of Mysto and Pizzi – was that they were in the early stages of their career and still had to support themselves with a variety of odd activities or were pursuing highly individual career paths. Flinders, who wanted to work as a screenwriter and director, was “struggling in Hollywood as an assistant in the entertainment industry” when starting the LONELY-GIRL15 project (Rushfield and Hoffman, “Lonelygirl15 Video Blog is Brainchild of 3 Filmmakers”). Stevie Ryan had appeared in two music videos and a Japanese commercial after living in Los Angeles for a year, and modeled for a fashion startup. Nevertheless, she also had to support herself by “working in a Levi’s store in Beverly Hills” (McGrath).

The distinction between professionalism and amateurism is sometimes understood as a distinction between commercial and non-commercial activities, that is, between production and distribution with or without a **financial motivation** involved (e.g. Lessig 255; Schumacher 167). It is safe to assume that users that were trying to earn money with related activities elsewhere hoped that their YouTube activities might directly or indirectly pay off, for example by increasing sales for Terra Naomi’s and Mysto and Pizzi’s music, and by opening new doors for the actresses Stevie Ryan and Lisa Donovan. From the onset, Hecox and Padilla’s SMOSH videos generated revenues on their own website to which they linked and where they were running ads. Motivations of YouTube users are complexly related and frequently changing over time, especially with increasing success (Lange 91). Users’ creative ways of monetizing their videos with growing success – even before the introduction of ad revenue sharing in 2007 – are the focus of chapter 7.4.

A distinction **between content creation within or outside the established media industries** is prominent in the scholarship. Michael Strangelove’s analysis, for example, “focuses on videos made by ordinary people: amateurs working outside the institutional structures of the television and movie industry” (14).

²⁸ See their videos *The Making of Nina Sky’s “Ladies Night”* and *Mysto & Pizzi in studio with Rhea for Cassie’s Album*.

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The increasing doubts about the production claims on LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST went hand in hand with suspicions that channels and videos were a product created within the established media industries or a marketing instrument for such a product, e.g. for the promotion of a Hollywood feature film.²⁹ However, the standing of the people running the project in the industry seems to have been marginal. While in college Mesh Flinders had completed a short film which “won the 2003 Occidental College student film award.” Another short film was in the making when the LONELYGIRL15 project was started. Its script won the Panavision Young Writer’s Award in 2004 and would premiere at the New York Short Film Festival later in 2006 (“Mesh Flinders”). Flinders’ struggles at the margins of the industry have already been mentioned. The Creative Artist’s Agency came aboard only well into the project (Rushfield and Hoffman). Several users, such as Stevie Ryan (LITTLELOCA) and Lisa Donovan (LISANOVA), had some connections but were clearly at the margins. Nate Burr’s (BLUNTY3000) one-off festival and television presences also have to be mentioned here. MYSTOANDPIZZI is the only channel in the corpus which was opened by people with a more than marginal standing in the entertainment industry.

During the time of interest, the people that began using YouTube and became successful on the platform were (with the exception of, to a certain extent, Mysto and Pizzi) not **famous** as filmmakers, actors/actresses, or musicians in overall popular culture. Such people began using YouTube later; Burgess and Green, for example, discuss Oprah Winfrey’s YouTube venture which was started in November 2007 (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 101). However, among early successful contributors of YouTube videos were people who did have a following on a smaller scale: Hecox/Padilla and Nate Burr had visitors and ‘fans’ on their own websites. It is safe to assume that Terra Naomi acquired some following when playing small venues throughout the US.

²⁹ E.g. Flemming, and various others qtd. in Christian and Rushfield & Hoffman, “Mystery Fuels Huge Popularity of Web’s Lonelygirl15.”

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Less than one percent of visitors of YouTube also contribute videos (Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 44). With reference to research projects aimed at studying “ordinary” creators and uploaders of YouTube videos, Patricia Lange makes a straightforward yet compelling point:

Although many people watch videos and some even comment, a much smaller sub-population actually posts videos. Therefore, if you are posting videos on YouTube, you are arguably no longer ordinary, if by ordinary we mean a person who has no special interest in or connections to intensive media-making. (“(Mis)conceptions” 90)

If considering contributors of videos in general as ‘ordinary’ is problematic, it will be no surprise that those contributors who turned out to be successful do not seem to be that ordinary on a close inspection either. One of the biggest accomplishments of Patricia Lange’s ethnographic work on YouTube is the complication of the distinction between amateurism and professionalism to which this section is indebted.

From the onset YouTube was welcomed by a range of different users. All of those that turned out to be successful video contributors brought along general performer skills and most of them also experience as users of other Web 2.0 services. Among early successful video contributors were people without a background in audiovisual (or musical) production; the share and impact of these people has been emphasized a lot in popular (Heffernan) and some academic texts (Jenkins, “Cultural Theory of YouTube” 94; Strangelove 14; van Dijck 115).

An important and novel finding is the significant extent of early contribution and success of people with experience in audiovisual or music production – some of them trained – that were already publicly showing their work elsewhere. Some of them already had a following online (e.g. Hecox/Padilla and Nate Burr), or gained recognition at film festivals (e.g. Flinders and Burr). People pursuing careers as directors, screenwriters, actors/actresses, producers, editors, and musicians were among early successful video contributors. Typically, they were in the early stages of their career (TASHA), or – very commonly – pursuing highly individual or alternative career ‘paths’ (SMOSH, BLUNTY3000, RENETTO, LITTLELOCA, LISANOVA). Financial motivations

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do not seem to have been very concrete, while some certainly hoped that their YouTube activities would somehow – elsewhere more likely than on YouTube – pay off.

These people welcomed a channel of distribution for their work and of building a viewership. These people were not ‘ordinary’ but neither did they have more than a marginal standing in the established media industries (with the exception of Mysto and Pizzi). They are either ignored or wrongly categorized with the polarized perspective on amateurism and industry professionalism that is common in the press and in some of the YouTube research.

The adoption of the platform by such people is usually situated later. Burgess and Green argue that “the professional-amateur divide is disrupted by entrepreneurial vloggers” – small-time commercial producers who are at the same time “authentic participants in the YouTube ‘community’” (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 104). Their examples of entrepreneurial vloggers all joined YouTube during the course of 2007, and the authors also make the point that YouTube video “was largely confined to the efforts of high-school and college-aged students by the end of 2006” (*YouTube* 35; see also van Dijck 115). The work of entrepreneurial vloggers is said to be “grounded in YouTube’s ‘grassroots’ culture” (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 91), in “ordinary, creative practice” (96). However, maybe YouTube’s popular culture was not that ordinary to begin with. It appears that YouTube did not so much signal changes for the relationship between ordinary people and the established media industries but offered chances for those producers who were standing ‘in between’ or had a complex situatedness anyway; and that this was the case from early on.

Showing one’s videos: A fundamental motivation for using YouTube

As I have previously pointed out, the view of YouTube videos as vehicles of communication and social networking is prominent in the research to date. The arguably communicative and connective motivations of users and outcomes of their use of the platform are played off against the production, distribution, and exhibition of videos: Videos are not “‘products’ that are distributed via social networks.” For those “participants who actively contribute content and engage in cultural conversation around online video, YouTube is in itself a social network site; one in which videos (rather than ‘friending’) are the primary me-

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dium of social connection between participants” (Burgess 101). “[A]mateurs” – a category that Burgess and Green use for a wide range of users including Lital Mizel aka. TASHA (*YouTube* 26) – are “engaging in textual productivity as a means to participation in social networks” (31). Their “creation and sharing of videos functions culturally as a means of social networking as opposed to as a mode of cultural ‘production’” (26). Video blogs are at the center of this argument.³⁰

Downplaying contributing users’ motivations and efforts to create and show videos is accompanied by an opposition to the notion of YouTube itself as a service for the distribution and exhibition of videos. Building on Harley and Fitzpatrick, Burgess and Green refer to YouTube’s own self-conceptualization “as an alternative ‘broadcaster’ (rather than a social network)” as mere “top-down conceit” (64).

Compared to other Web 2.0 platforms, communicative and social networking functions were neither well evolved nor prominent on YouTube’s interface (see p. 36; also Burgess and Green 63). MySpace, LiveJournal, or chatrooms would have been likely choices for communication and social networking at the time; and indeed, a couple of the users from the corpus ‘did their social networking’ on these platforms (see previous sections). What’s more, the limited functionality of YouTube in this regard did not require users to produce and upload videos: Users might have just used their YouTube accounts to ‘Friend’ other users, to post in ‘Groups,’ to try to start discussions in the comment sections of videos, or to send private messages to other users – if communication and social networking had been their prime aims. Why spend time and effort to create and upload videos if you did not have to do it to communicate and social network? The users from the corpus, however, did use YouTube in this manner: They created videos and uploaded them to the platform. Obviously this was how they wanted to use the platform. If showing such videos were not a principal aim, they would have used a different platform or used YouTube in a different way.

Focusing on the users from the core corpus, I am now going to demonstrate that creating videos was or became an endeavor of YouTube users with and without a background in related areas. A fundamental motivation for using YouTube was to show one’s videos.

³⁰ E.g. 32, 54, 56; similarly: Harley and Fitzpatrick 681.

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Unsurprisingly, the motivation of users who initially used the platform as a new outlet for videos they had already distributed via other outlets (e.g. SMOSH, THEWINEKONE, RENETTO and BLUNTY3000) was to show their videos. In an interview in 2009 Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) said: “I started doing animations with Lego [...]. And YouTube came along and presented me with a way to host and sort of expand the audience I was getting for those. So I threw up all my films up there.” In the introduction of one of his videos Paul Robinett (RENETTO) said that the search for an outlet and viewers for a “short film” – which he had previously shown to friends and uploaded to Google Video – “brought” him “to YouTube” (674 - *A short film by paul robinett*).

The function of YouTube was not only the distribution and exhibition of existing videos but also the stimulation for the production of new videos and of their subsequent showing on the platform: It is obvious that most videos in the corpus were created to be shown on YouTube and would not have been created without the platform. The most obvious indication of this is the address of viewers as viewers of YouTube videos (e.g. in *Boy Problems... - Renetto Reviews*). YouTube, then, functioned as a catalyst for audiovisual production.

Several vloggers present themselves as producers or production companies in opening or closing titles. Hecox and Padilla introduce *Mortal Kombat Theme* as a “smosh.com Production” (Fig. 2.1.3-4) and *The California Stereotype Experiment* as a “Smosh Productions video / By Anthony Padilla & Ian Hecox.” Several of their videos have credits in which they list tasks and name who was responsible for them, giving an account of and emphasizing ‘the making’ of the video (e.g. *The Epic Battle: Jesus vs Cyborg Satan*). From his second video on, Tony Huynh used a brief opening title sequence of a “The Wine Kone / presents” title card (*Oh Hungry? Oh Man!*) and a second card showing the respective video title. He added a “TWK Films” logo to the closing titles of videos released from mid-2006 on (Fig. 2.1.18). Pedro Morbeck used a “Bitch Productions” title sequence with a strip of 16mm film as a part of his logo (Fig. 2.1.19). References to film and television production are striking in all of these examples.

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2.1.18-19 Frames from THEWINEKONE's ... *And Smell the Coffee* and MORBECK's *Filthy Whore's breasts*.

There are many statements from vloggers in which they emphasize the importance of audiovisual creation to their YouTube participation. In *Everything Changes* Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) took her deal with Carson Daly as an occasion to reflect on her YouTube activities thus far: "Once upon a time / [...] there was a girl / Who liked to make movies...very much / Many thought she was crazy / But regardless of that / She made her movies anyway... / BROOKERS !!" Melody Oliveria is one of a couple of vloggers in the corpus for whom communication and social networking were indeed motivations for using YouTube, as her profilmic presentation in *First Videoblog* and other videos suggest (see also pp. 111-112). Nevertheless, creating videos was a dedicated motivation as well. In *BowieChick on BowieChick* she responds to the "common question" why she "started doing video blogs":

I always enjoyed doing blogs online. I also enjoyed making videos, and so I decided to mix them together. [...] I enjoyed doing them. And I knew that even if nobody did watch them I would continue making them anyways. I liked editing them.

Whereas Brodack's and Oliveria's statements emphasize enjoying audiovisual creation, other vloggers emphasize the work aspects. Here goes Pedro Morbeck: "It takes a lot of work and effort. [...] I could be uploading like 20 videos a day like nornna, but I'm actually one of those that takes the time to write a script, to edit, to do the voiceover" (*To the fans and haters*). For Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) bringing up some time and effort seem to be the key to success on YouTube: "The

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best way, in my view, is to make a genuinely entertaining video that is well-thought out, probably planned in advance. People will watch, people will enjoy, people will subscribe” (*Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*). Paul Robinett (RENETTO) voices similar sentiments in the context of the announcement of revenue sharing on YouTube in 2007. Competition is likely to grow on the platform because new video contributors will arrive. Established YouTube video contributors have two options: They can

bitch and moan about it, or they can step up, and they can make some content, and they can work, and they can be dedicated to it, and they can produce, produce, produce, produce, and they can hammer away at it, and try to build a following for themselves. And maybe make enough money to go out to eat at the end of the week, maybe make enough money to make a living out of it. (*Money, Money, Money, Money... Money is coming to YouTube*)

Within the overall frame of audiovisual creation, several vloggers make statements about creativity and innovation. In *3:00 AM Madness* Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) rants about people who “talk to the camera with dead eyes and a dead face” and about people who “lip sync” in their videos: “They are not good. They are not funny.” His advice is: “Do something innovative, something unique, that someone has never done on a webcam and then show it to the world.” He then provides several examples of what he thinks might be such activities. Nate Burr rants about users who use misleading video titles that suggest pornography to boost their view counts: “Shit, if you care that much about how many views your videos get, why not try being enter-fucking-taining and original?” (*Lets just call this one Fagsus 2: electric boogaloo*). Already in his first YouTube tutorial he ‘curated’ a list of creative vloggers, which included THEWINEKONE and MORBECK from the core corpus. In early 2007 Morbeck went through a creative crisis which he referred to as “director’s block” (*Director’s Block*).

Vloggers interchangeably referred to their videos as ‘videos,’ ‘films,’ ‘movies,’ and, less frequently, ‘content’ (see quotes above), which indicates how they contextualized their activities with other practices in which audiovisual artifacts are created.

While commercial motivations were routinely suspected to be the driving force ‘behind’ LONELYGIRL15, the trio running the project also

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voiced creative ambitions. Miles Beckett said their “goal was to tell a very realistic fictional story in this medium.” The trio was interested in the narrative potential of online video (qtd. in Rushfield and Hoffman; also Davis) and, as will become clear throughout the following chapters, in the emerging conventions of video blogging.

Creating videos was or became an endeavor for YouTube users with and without a background in audiovisual production or other creative fields. Among the users discussed here, those of BROOKERS, BOWIECHICK, and MORBECK did not have such a background, were pure ‘amateurs.’ Showing one’s videos was a fundamental motivation for using YouTube in 2005 and 2006. It was not only how users who contributed videos and who turned out to be successful used the service; it was also how they conceptualized their use. The motivations, identifications, and practice of users who created and uploaded videos – video bloggers and others – should not be ignored or subordinated to communication and social networking (cf. Burgess and Green, YouTube 26).

The second part of my challenge to the argument about communication and social networking via videos is an analysis of the actual extent and quality of response and reciprocal activity in comments and video responses (chapters 7.3 and 7.5). I am going to show that even in the early days of YouTube – to which the argument is sometimes specifically applied (van Dijck 115) – the actual extent of viewer response and reciprocal activity between users was small and thus does not support the overarching argument that has been made.

A taxonomy of kinds of video projects in the next chapter and the subsequent chapter ‘Different Kinds of Videos’ will offer more insights into users’ aims within the overall aim of showing videos.

2.2 Three Arguments about Video Production

In the context of the overall aim of chapter 2 of studying the neglected field of video production, I want to pose three arguments here. In the first section I am introducing the idea that video bloggers were pursuing specific video projects, and that, ultimately, choices about production, content, form, and distribution/exhibitions of a video depended on the object they singled out for their video. In the subsequent section I am suggesting that such choices also depended on the scarcity that was a condition of YouTube videomaking in 2005 and 2006. In the

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third section I am approaching the unwieldy issue of the quality of videos in the early days of YouTube. The current high quality standards invite a view of early YouTube culture as a primitive stage only identifiable by bad quality that was begging for continuous improvement towards 'professional' standards. Contrary to that I am arguing that video bloggers worked to improve the quality of their videos and conventionalized low quality. They reflected on the quality of their videos and developed standards among themselves. There was a negotiated level of quality in video blogging. While the three arguments are posed here and some support is also provided, they are primarily supported throughout the rest of the study.

In this chapter I am mainly dealing with the mode of production of regular video blogs. However, an analysis of the mode of production that was simulated in unacknowledged fictional video blogs would lead to similar results. That is, an analysis of the framed fictional situation of production visible to viewers within the framing situation of production that was hidden from their eyes (see 1.4 Terms, Concepts, and Methods for the Analysis, p. 57).

Video projects/video objects

Speaking of "plot," his "first principle" of tragedy and epic poetry, Aristotle argues:

[A] plot does not have unity, as some people think, simply because it deals with a single hero. [...] As then in the other arts of representation a single representation means a representation of a single object, so too the plot being a representation of a piece of action must represent a single piece of action and the whole of it; and the component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them be transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed. (*Poetics*, section 1451a)

Unlike Aristotle, Bordwell and Thompson propose a general notion for the unity of films without giving preeminence to "representation" and "action": "All of the relationships among elements in a film create the total filmic system. [...] When all the relationships we perceive within a film are clear and economically interwoven, we say that the film has unity" (65). They make two concessions: "Unity is, however, a matter of degree. Almost no film is so tight as to leave no end dangling" (65).

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The second concession is that of a “give-and-take” between unity and other “criteria” for the evaluation of films, such as “complexity” and “originality;” that is, a ‘loose’ element may add complexity and be very original (58-9).

Not only from the perspective of a prescriptive poetics, also from the perspective of a descriptive or analytical poetics several questions arise: Is there such a notion as unity in video blogging? If there should be such a notion: What gives unity to videos on vlogs? And furthermore: What are the functions of unity/disunity in video blogging? At the beginning of my engagement with video blogs, these questions did not feature prominently: Videos on vlogs seemed, at a first glance, too raw and spontaneously created to become the subject of such inquiries. As Burgess and Green point out, the “video about nothing” was a common notion in popular discussions about YouTube videos (25); such a notion would make asking for a video’s “single object,” in Aristotle’s terms, pointless. If vloggers were “broadcasting the self” – which is another popular notion and also cherished by the company itself (26) – we might ask for a “single object” but YouTube videos would ‘fail’ for having the totality of the self as their object.

However, an important result of my analysis of the overall form of videos (chapter 6.1) was that most of them did in fact have single objects. A prime dramaturgical function of these objects was to provide overall unity to individual videos.

Because there seemed to be a tendency for videos to ‘receive’ their objects relatively early in the production process (see chapter 2.4) and because the recognition and acknowledgment of the very fact of unity in video blogging seemed to be important, the notion of a video’s single object will be introduced here at this early position of the study, in the context of the study of production.

Unlike the narrative cultural forms in view in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in videos on vlogs the “single object” was not necessarily a “single piece of action”: The kind of object depended on the kind of project a vlogger pursued with a given video (which was a narrative project only in some cases). Creating and showing videos was an overall motivation underlying the YouTube participation of the vloggers from the corpus. But with reference to individual videos we can ask: What was the project of a given video? Distinguishing between kinds of projects allows us to distinguish between kinds of objects.

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Here is a list of the most-common kinds of video projects, and in brackets the respective kinds of objects that provided a video with unity:

- giving an account of a day's events (the events of a day),
- speaking about a topic (a topic),
- documenting an activity (an activity),
- documenting a place (a place),
- presenting a skill (a skill),
- creating a music video for a sound recording of a piece of music (a sound recording),
- creating a parodic enactment of another person or fictional character (that person or character),
- creating a comedic sketch (depending on the type of sketch: a character, a situation, or a premise).

As in other practices (Bordwell and Thompson 65), unity is a matter of degree in video blogging. And of course this taxonomy is not exhaustive. In some instances, a given video project can be conceived of as one kind from one angle and as another from a different angle: If we think of the project of Brooke Brodack's *Cell block Tango* as 'creating a lip sync music video for the song "Cell Block Tango,"' this project can alternatively be categorized as 'showing off a skill' (i.e. the skill of lip syncing) and as 'creating a music video.'

It will be no surprise that kinds of video projects typically correspond to kinds of videos: The videos I will refer to as public diary clips in the next chapter seem to be the result of projects of giving an account of a day's activities, subject clips the result of speaking about a topic, and music videos – very obviously – of projects of the creation of a music video.

Depending on the video project and object a vlogger pursued, decisions about production, content, form, and distribution/exhibition could be made. In *Renetto goes TANNING* – a video documenting an activity: visiting a tanning studio – the vlogger makes a meta-referential remark before lying down on the tanning bed which may serve to illustrate this with reference to decision making during the shooting stage: "I need to somehow position my laptop, so we can go tanning together" (Fig. 2.2.1).

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2.2.1 Paul Robinett wonders how to create a shot of himself in a tanning bed (background left) before positioning the laptop with the built-in camera on a chair and lying down.

Two related disclaimers have to be made with regards to the argument about the motivation of vloggers' choices in terms of the requirements of specific video projects: Of course vloggers' creative choices depended on appropriating and transforming devices from other practices. But apart from that, with the ongoing coalescence and conventionalization of the practice video blogging, we also have to acknowledge that vloggers' choices were increasingly guided by "options offered by tradition," by the tradition of video blogging itself (see analog Bordwell, *Poetics* 29). Some choices, then, can increasingly be regarded as video blogging defaults that were made with little reflection. The second disclaimer is that some choices appear to be made for the mere reason of creating variety. The interplay between motivation, convention, and variety will be an issue in the chapters about setting (3.1), cinematography (5.1), and editing (5.2).

Scarcity

Besides the object of a video, choices about production, content, form, and distribution/exhibition depended on the scarcity that was, as I am going to suggest in this section, a condition of YouTube videomaking in 2005 and 2006.

The "notion of scarcity plays a central role in economic theory" and is at the heart of many definitions of economic behavior and economics itself (Montani 253), for example by Lionel Robbins. According to Robbins, (only) the "means for achieving human ends" which are

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“limited” can be called scarce (16). Humans make decisions about the “alternative use” (13) of scarce means “to satisfy ends of various importance” (15). Such problems and decision making can be called “economic” – and “economics” the study of such behavior (16).

One of the distinguishing features of YouTube and similar online video platforms started in 2005 were their “low barriers to entry” (Burgess and Green, “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 103). YouTube did not review videos and was free-to-use for both uploaders and viewers.

However, the founders were no media activists: In the era of Web 2.0 there was the expectation that “money tend[ed] to follow users” (Snickars and Vonderau 11), and the founders wanted, according to their own statements, to create a “product” that would eventually turn out to be “profitable” (Karim). Thus YouTube was not only an open platform, it was also initially an empty platform, a platform in need of users and videos.

YouTube did not present videos in an egalitarian way: As soon as a video was uploaded, it became the object of a system of evaluations through viewers and of rankings in terms of various parameters of achievement (see chapter 7.2). Thus, on the one hand, YouTube was ‘anything goes;’ but, on the other hand, it was ‘anything will be evaluated and ranked.’

In economic terms, YouTube video production can be regarded as a response to the needs of the platform’s owners for users and videos, of viewers’ needs for videos they would approve of, and, of course, of videomakers’ own creative and other productive needs. I am going to suggest in the following and throughout this study that the means to satisfy these needs were scarce. Moreover, that scarcity and vloggers’ tactics of responding to scarcity shaped decisions and emerging conventions of production, setting, performance, use of audiovisual techniques, and distribution/exhibition. One way of making sense of the overall aesthetics of videos on vlogs would be in terms of an aesthetics of scarcity and responding to scarcity.

It is well known that there is no natural scarcity for information goods because information goods do not diminish by being used (e.g. Linde 294–295). A cake (i.e. a material good) will disappear when ‘used’ but not so a cake’s recipe (i.e. an information good). In order to make information goods marketable, scarcity is artificially created for example through patent and copyright legislation. YouTube videos are information goods thus natural scarcity on the level of showing the finished video is out of the question. My argument is about production mostly. It only concerns distribution/exhibition insofar as attention on

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the platform can increasingly be regarded as scarce because of the growing masses of videos vying for viewers.

There are several areas of scarcity which will be introduced here.

The very **objects** at the heart of videos can be scarce. After “cruising around on YouTube” for a “couple of hours,” Nate Burr complains:

If one of the first things you say in your video is: “Ehmm, I don’t know what to talk about but...,” you probably shouldn’t be making a video. The most important thing when making a video is to have something to talk about. (*More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*)

It is significant in this context that an experienced and successful vlogger is talking (down) to inexperienced and unsuccessful vloggers in this video tutorial because on successful video blogs scarcity of objects hardly seems to be an issue. What the video blogs from the corpus give ample evidence of, however, are tactics of responding to a scarcity of objects: tactics of generating objects.

“[E]veryday life” and “everyday activities” are said to be very important in YouTube videos (e.g. Strangelove 15, 16); and a few videos in the corpus actually take everyday topics and activities as their objects (e.g. *First Videoblog* on BOWIECHICK). But what if the everyday does not provide enough topics to talk about or activities to document?

- ‘Spice up your life’ might be an answer, that is, subjecting yourself to unusual situations for the purpose of documenting them. Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) visits a local forest and tries to “summon up ghosts” in *The Delaware Boy*. In *Build a Works Bomb with Renetto* Paul Robinett ‘experiments’ with toilet bowl cleaner and aluminum foil, creating an explosion.
- Not performing as oneself but as a fictional character is another option: Virtually everything can ‘happen’ in the life of a fictional character and thus become the object of a YouTube video. Morbeck’s creation of Chipmunk Chick would be the prime example of such a response (see Figs. 2.1.13-14).
- The whole range of intertextual videos can also be seen as a reaction to a scarcity of video objects: Music videos, parodic performance videos, and video reviews (see chapter 2.3) all take material from elsewhere and make it the object of a video.

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As I have previously shown, there are both users with and without previous **experience** in audiovisual production in the corpus. In the case of the latter and to some extent also in the case of the former we can speak of a scarcity of experience at the beginning of their YouTube activities. Landry and Guzdial characterize such a “composition gap” by a lack of “artistic vision” and of “technical skill” which creates “potential barriers to people who wish to author videos” for YouTube (Landry and Guzdial 8). Inexperience only mattered in the cases of users who wanted to do something, i.e. were pursuing a video project, and recognized that they were running into problems.

The first video Tony Huynh uploaded to his channel is an interesting case in this regard because he reflects on his own lack of experience in a “Special Director’s Commentary” version attached to the ‘actual’ video. Huynh apologizes because his “performance is horrible” particularly in a scene in which he is “struggling to find the words to say.” An unintended jump cut is denounced as a “horrible transition.” Huynh also notices the “camera strap dangling in” in a high angle shot (THEWINEKONE, *The Delaware Boy*). Tellingly, Peter Oakley (GERI-ATRIC1927) called the first video he uploaded *first try*. He calls out to other vloggers: “As you can see, I need a lot of help.”

Learning by doing and learning from others (by paying attention to other vloggers’ practice and by watching tutorials) were tactics of dealing with inexperience (see also Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 38–40). Tony Huynh himself started giving advice to others after some months of vlogging (e.g. *3:00 AM Madness*) and also noticed how others copied devices from his own videos (Huynh in *Hand Gestures* and *Congratulations*).

A scarcity of **personnel** in front of and behind the camera can be witnessed in videos on nearly all video blogs of the corpus. Paul Robinett’s problem “to somehow position” the camera “to go tanning” with his viewers is a problem of a missing camera operator after all (Fig. 2.2.1).

Several responses to the scarcity of personnel go under the heading of multitasking, that is, of executing various tasks at the same time or, if possible, in sequence. Multitasking during the performance (i.e. simultaneous multitasking) will be in view in chapter 3.3. Morbeck’s use of eye line matches between shots in *The Cat fight* (Figs. 2.1.13-14) and of split-screen compositing in *YouTube Don’ts* (Fig. 2.2.2) to present different characters in interaction are tactics of multitasking which work by creating a sequence from tasks which would have been executed simultaneously if additional performers had been at hand:

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Morbeck wrote an outline or script, performed as one character first and then – after changing costume and make up – as another, and made the different materials function in harmony through editing and compositing during postproduction. Counter-intuitively, Burgess and Green read such tactics as examples of “collective creativity” (67). Pretty obviously Morbeck’s tactics are still examples of individual creativity – even of a creativity in which the notion of a vlogger working on his own is heightened by acknowledging the lack of other participants; the same performer beneath the different characters is still recognizable after all.



2.2.2 Chipmunk Chick and Trixie Love – both played by Pedro Morbeck – in *YouTube Don'ts*.

Involving additional participants was the other type of response to the scarcity of personnel. Such tactics will be studied in detail in chapter 5.1 where I am going to describe a cinematography in which static and mobile framing depended on the number of participants. Additional participants typically contributed both as performers and as people fulfilling production tasks (e.g. as camera operators) in the same video and were recruited for free from the vlogger’s local social network: friends and family, that is.

Limits of the **equipment** also characterized video production. Not only at the beginning of their YouTube activities, vloggers predominantly used cameras from the consumer segment: cheap camcorders, photo cameras with a complimentary video function, webcams built

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into computers, and external webcams.³¹ Windows XP and Mac OS X provided video editing software solutions during the time of interest, Windows Movie Maker and iMovie respectively, which were commonly used by vloggers.³² The limits of the equipment were reached – and should only be called limits – if a particular video project required more in terms of functionality or quality than the equipment was able to offer. In the closing titles of *Butterfly*, Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) complains that her camera can only store 45 MB of video data which “made this so hard to film,” probably especially in the case of the material shot outdoors where backing up material from the camera to a computer was not convenient. In *The Delaware Boy* Tony Huynh apologizes because his camera is only able to record takes of 30 seconds duration; several times in the video he is interrupted right in the middle of a sentence because the camera stopped recording. There are videos in which a tripod or additional lights (Fig. 2.2.3) would have been helpful to enable better framing and lighting respectively.

The two tactics of dealing with limits of the equipment were “an optimal way of using the tool that’s available” (Cubitt 45) and buying better or additional equipment. In his second video Tony Huynh seems to have organized his performance into bits of a duration the camera could cope with (*Oh Hungry? Oh Man!*). Vloggers improved lighting by using all domestic light sources available and positioning them in a way that their faces were illuminated (see next section). Instead of a tripod, flat surfaces could be used to put a camera to rest. The scarcity of money made upgrading equipment a less likely option: Most of the vloggers in the corpus upgraded equipment only slowly.

Money to finance video projects was also scarce in the early days of YouTube. Relying on private resources seems to have been the rule for most vloggers at the beginning of their activities.³³

³¹ In *EmoSpace* (BROOKERS) a mirror shot shows a digital photo camera. Paul Robinett shot *Renetto goes TANNING* using the built-in webcam of a MacBook. In *My webcam* Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) speaks about the Logitech Quickcam Orbit MP, an external webcam, she used.

³² See video descriptions of *Practice clip* (BROOKERS) and *Re: Who are you....Who, Who...Who, Who* (GERIATRIC1927), see also Huynh, Interview by Kenny Crane.

³³ This was also the case for the producers of LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST where neither the production values nor contextual sources indicate external finance at the beginning of the project (see Davis).

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Taking into account the high numbers of views YouTube videos with low production values could draw through most of the time of interest – SMOSH’s cheaply produced *Pokemon Theme Song* had 14 million views in July 2006 (Internet Archive, 5 July 2006) – missing revenues for creative work or reach seem to be an even bigger problem than finance. Vloggers found various creative ways of monetizing their videos even before YouTube began ‘sharing’ ad revenues with selected users in May 2007 (see chapter 7.4).

Was vloggers’ **time** a scarce good? Several authors quote vloggers who provide boredom as a motivation for creating videos, but they also read these statements as rhetorical tactics of fitting in with the mythical ‘community’ of ‘ordinary’ users (Willett, “Parodic Practices” 119; Schumacher 167). It is interesting to see that bored teenagers with too much time on their hands are usually fictional in the corpus: the vlogging character presented on EMOKID21OHIO in particular but also Bree of LONELYGIRL15. There are several statements from vloggers that suggest that time was a scarce resource for them. In his complaint that many viewers don’t realize that creating his videos “takes a lot of work and effort,” Morbeck also stresses that it “takes [...] time” (*To the fans and haters*).

Efficiency was a response to the scarcity of time, which will become clear in the chapter about multitasking (3.3). An interesting phenomenon are videos that were recorded while driving a car (e.g. *Renetto ROCKS with Bon Jovi*). Nate Burr noticed such a trend and suggested that people “want to try something different” and that they “are time-poor” and “figure that if they blog while they drive [...] they are saving a bit of time” (*Driving Insanity*). There seems to have been a dilemma: Even if there are cases of successful YouTube videos that were produced without spending a lot of time, generally speaking, videos that would stick out and were likely to become successful took more time in production than average or unsuccessful videos – if we believe the advice of vloggers like Nate Burr (*Vblog – how to be popular on youtube*) and Pedro Morbeck.

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Especially in the second half of 2006 competition for viewers and subscribers increased on YouTube (see 7.3 Aiming for Success, p. 311). Thus we can assume that from the perspective of the uploading user **attention** for videos uploaded to the platform became scarce.³⁴

If scarcity is a defining condition of economic problems, it will be no surprise that scarcity matters in all kinds of commercial (and most kinds of non-commercial) audiovisual production: Every film and television production – no matter how high its budget – is trying to allocate scarce material and immaterial resources in a manner that satisfies its wants the best (see Bordwell and Thompson 25). What makes scarcity and producing audiovisual artifacts under the condition of scarcity in video blogging special?

First, it is the overall low level of production values: This level is conspicuous to viewers and distinguishes early YouTube videomaking from mainstream film and television productions. But the ways in which scarcity and dealing with scarcity are reflected on and shown in the videos themselves seem to be more important. Creating audiovisual artifacts that 'look' professional in spite of scarcity is a major goal in film school and semi-professional contexts of production (e.g. production of image films for businesses). It is also the message of many YouTube tutorials not released on YouTube itself, for example of a *Wired* article from May 2006 by Jim Feeley and a handbook by Michael Miller from 2007 (qtd. in Müller, "Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video" 126). Nevertheless, trying to look professional was not what I found in videos on successful video blogs of 2005 and 2006 (which include a few tutorials): Acknowledging, reflecting, and responding to scarcity is visible and audible in videos. The advice of the tutorials is also not really that of a 'professionalization,' as I am going to show in the next section.

³⁴ See Franck, *Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit*, 49-51, for the economies of attention in the Internet age in general.

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A negotiated level of quality

Today, the overall quality level of videos on successful YouTube channels is a lot higher than it was in 2005 and 2006. To some extent this is the result of changes on the platform itself: YouTube's introduction of the MPEG-4 "High Definition" codec in December 2009 significantly reduced compression artifacts and thus the quality 'gap' between YouTube videos and television broadcasts in terms of image quality. Better audio codecs were introduced as well.³⁵ More importantly, the production values of then and now are beyond compare: The use of semi-professional or professional equipment seems to be the standard on contemporary successful channels. Users speak clearly and fast, and hardly get lost or 'uhm'. There are few peaks in voice recordings and little overall noise. Lighting is unobtrusive and balanced in contemporary videos (see also Coda, pp. 395-398).

The current high standards could support a view of early YouTube video as a primitive stage devoid of forms and conventions: a stage only identifiable by the bad quality of its videos that was begging for continuous improvement towards professional standards. Such a view was expressed by professionals who were primarily or fully working off-YouTube and released a YouTube tutorial in book (Miller), magazine article (Feeley), or YouTube video format (Carter) (all qtd. Müller, "Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video" 126, 133–135).³⁶ It can also be found in early news coverage of the platform which deplores the low quality of YouTube videos. By contrast, I suggest that the low quality level in the early days of YouTube was negotiated and functional in its own right. I want to support this overall argument with

³⁵ See the *YouTube Blog* on the introduction of "High Definition" (18 Dec. 2008).

³⁶ Unlike Müller, I suggest that statements about video quality and videomaking advice differ in tutorials released on and off YouTube. Müller's overall finding that "the quality discourse on YouTube works to structure possible acts of audiovisual participation according to well-established conventions and standards" (137) would have been less clear if a distinction between tutorials on and off YouTube had been made. About half of his examples are tutorials that were released by people who – at times vocally – self-identified as non-YouTube users and/or were not released on YouTube (130-136). These examples are, nonetheless, taken as indicative of the "quality discourse on YouTube" (137).

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reference to image and sound quality here, but it will also be supported in my analysis of performance (4.4 The Representation of Accidents).

In *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!* Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) asks fellow vloggers to “[p]ay a little attention to the technical details. Pay attention to lighting. If people can’t see you properly they can’t see your expressions. That’s a very important thing when listening to someone talk.”



2.2.3-5 THEWINEKONE: *3:00 AM Madness*, *The Next James Dean*, and *Hotness Prevails*.

Interestingly, when producing the underexposed *3:00 AM Madness*, Tony Huynh had an additional light source available in the same room: We can see a switched-off lamp, probably a floor lamp, to his left (Fig. 2.2.3). For his next video he used the same or another lamp to create a better illumination of his face in his impersonation of James Dean (Fig. 2.2.4). He positioned the lamp top left, pretty close to his face, and turned off all other light sources to create a low-key illumination.

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For *Hotness Prevails*, uploaded about two months later, he used two light sources that brightly illuminated his face and eliminated each other's shading (Fig. 2.2.5). At the beginning of the video he points to these lights (which are off-screen to the left and right of his head) and says that he has turned them "to the highest brightness level because [his] camera doesn't pick up light very well." What we see on THEWINEKONE is an improvement of lighting and thus of image quality in one and the same vlog. Available domestic resources are effectively and efficiently employed in the second and third examples.

In his tutorial, Nate Burr also gives advice to improve "sound quality":

There are settings on your computer to adjust the sensitivity of the mic. If it's really really soft, pump it up a bit. If it's bleating out of the top, pull it down a bit. If your camera has got a crappy microphone or you have a crappy microphone, spend a few dollars and get a halfway decent one. It doesn't have to be perfect. I mean, I'm using the microphone built into my camera. It's sounds okay. You can hear me properly, you know. It doesn't have to be a studio quality recording, just so long as people can hear you properly without having to pump up the damn speakers, listen through a bunch of static, or have to turn it down so far, because you're peaking out the microphone.

While "sound quality" like image quality was an "issue" in the early days of YouTube, perfection was not the goal "just so long as people [could] hear you properly" according to Nate Burr. Importantly, he explicitly distinguished the sound quality of a "better" YouTube video from that of a "studio quality recording;" that is, he put a limit to an improvement of quality.

To some extent, Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) improved the audio quality of his videos. In *first try* peaking audio was the result of recording an intro with a blues track playing on the stereo at full blast. The vlogger's own voice was comparatively soft and accompanied by a lot of static when he spoke during the rest of the video. For *Telling it all part 1*, uploaded a few days later, he created an opening title sequence during postproduction using a sound file thus preserving the fidelity of the sound recording. Instead of using the microphone of his webcam, he started using the microphone of a headset. Thus he achieved a clearer recording of his voice and lower levels of static

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while remaining in the consumer segment of audio equipment. Importantly, compared to the quick improvement of quality in his first week of vlogging, Oakley stuck to his new equipment and mode of production for a very long time, until June 2008.³⁷ The sound quality he achieved with adding music in postproduction and using a headset – while still providing lo-fi results – was obviously good enough for his purposes and the standards of video blogging, as his ongoing practice and success suggest.

While the image and sound quality of YouTube videos improved over the years to the present (see Schumacher 166), the early stage of YouTube videos was not an unformed realm of ‘bad’ video and audio waiting for improvement, but rather a realm in which video bloggers developed their own terms of what a ‘good’ YouTube video was. The company preconditioned the quality levels of image and sound to some extent, for example by employing specific codecs and a specific image resolution. Video bloggers provided each other with guidelines and critique. They improved the quality of their videos as much as they considered necessary. Instead of calling for ever more improvement towards professional standards, they conventionalized and approved of a specific ‘low’ level of quality, for example in the approval of built-in microphones and of a comparatively high tolerance of noise.

2.3 Different Kinds of Videos

The vloggers from the corpus created videos of different kinds and uploaded them to their YouTube channels. In the previous chapter I indicated that the different kinds of video projects pursued by vloggers typically corresponded with such kinds of videos. In this chapter I introduce the most common kinds of videos. Because the term genre implies a highly evolved relationship between producer, artifact, and audience of the classical Hollywood ilk (Altman 14), I use the quotidian and less-loaded term ‘kind’ to refer to these formations.

In a very general way, kinds of videos distinguish themselves in terms of the video project and object, production, setting, performance, the use of audiovisual techniques, and distribution/exhibition. Not

³⁷ In the video *In praise of youth* he is not using the headset anymore.

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surprisingly, each of these kinds has a relationship with one or several contemporary or historical kinds of cultural formations.

Did vloggers make similar creative choices again and again, and do we recognize a kind of video as a cluster of the resulting traits; or, were choices between possible kinds of videos the starting point from which other creative choices ensued? The answer to this question would depend on the degree of conventionalization of video blogging at a particular moment. It seems that when YouTube went online in April 2005 the first, and that at the end of 2006 the second answer would be correct: Just like the audiovisual form video blog in general, specific kinds of videos within the form emerged in 2005 and 2006. It seems that during the course of these years vloggers increasingly knew what video kind they would be ‘working in’ already when starting to produce a video; that choosing to produce a video of a specific kind could be the starting point and that other choices would follow. Of course this also depended on the participation history of a given vlogger.

Related to this issue – a chicken-or-egg dilemma – is the question of where to study kinds of videos. I introduce them here because this provides me with terms for the chapters about setting, performance, and the use of audiovisual techniques and thus facilitates an understanding of these chapters – even if, from a different perspective, kinds of videos were merely the result of such choices.³⁸

The table in the appendix which provides an overview of key data for the channels of the corpus has a column that lists the kinds of videos that were most common on each channel.

In **public diary clips** vloggers talk about activities of their day thus far and occasionally provide an outlook about further plans. Melody Oliveria’s *First Videoblog* (BOWIECHICK) would be an example of such a video that also inspired other users like Pedro Morbeck and the producers of LONELYGIRL15. Here goes Oliveria’s monologue from the video’s middle section:

³⁸ See analog the structure of Bordwell and Thompson’s *Film Art*, where the chapter “Types of Films” precedes the chapters about the study of the mise-en-scene, cinematography, and so on.

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Today I just went to school, which kind of sucked except an English class. We got in groups and like had a read or something. And that took like the whole entire class almost. But we got to pick our groups, and I was in a group with like two of my friends and we went into the hall and we ran like talking about whatever. If someone saw us, they'd probably think we were high because we were acting like idiots. They wrote all over my shoes. I'll show you. [*Holds a shoe in front of the camera and reads out the inscriptions. RH*] And then after school, my boyfriend Aaron came over, and I kind of made him watch the Reality Tour DVD. I can watch that so many times and I never get tired of it. It's really cool. I wish I could have been to the concert. It's too bad. I don't see I'll ever see him live. Tomorrow is like a short day in school so I get off at 11:05 or something.

Corporeal delivery – vocal delivery to be precise – is dominant in such videos (see p. 50). Audiovisual delivery matters not only for the mere reason that the presentation was recorded by a camera, but also because nearly all public diary clips were edited and some, like *First Videoblog*, also use titles (Figs. 2.4.13-14).

Seymour Chatman's typology of the "text-types" argument, description, and narrative in literature and film can be used to make sense of some of the differences between kinds of YouTube videos. According to Chatman, "[a]rguments are texts that attempt to persuade an audience of the validity of some proposition" and "[d]escriptions render the properties of things" (9). What makes "narrative unique" is its "doubly temporal logic" of "Discourse" and "Story", since, unlike examples of other text-types, narrative texts operate on both temporal levels. Examples of other text-types "do not have an internal time sequence, even though, obviously, they take time to read, view, or hear" (9). The "text-types routinely operate at each other's service" in any given text while one text-type usually predominates (10).

In public diary clips, now, the narrative text-type seems to prevail. A "doubly temporal logic" is constituted between the events of the day (story) and the vlogger's oral rendering of these events (discourse). As we will see, there are other kinds of videos that are largely narrative but which fundamentally differ in terms of narrativity and the techniques used.

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Much has been made of the obvious genealogical relation of diary clips with private written diaries and video diaries (e.g. Strangelove 64; Reichert 24). I want to explain my own choice of 'public' and confront what we might call the private-gone-public myth. According to Jean Burgess "privatised' spaces of cultural participation" increasingly "have become 'publicised' via webcams, SNS profiles and YouTube" (106). In a similar vein Michael Strangelove claims that "YouTube and amateur online video provide a new window into the extraordinary nature of everyday people" (117). In the vast majority of videos in the corpus, that is even in the early days of YouTube, people were clearly performing for a public audience, and – with the exception of those videos initially released via another public outlet – videos were produced for the purpose of being shown on YouTube, which can be seen, for example, in vloggers' address of viewers as viewers of YouTube videos (e.g. GERIATRIC1927, *The vicar and the police questions*). Already in *First Videoblog*, Melody refers to possible negative "comments like 'You're so fat'" and encourages viewers of her video to "be nice." Vloggers were also careful about the personal information they revealed. Accordingly, these videos should be seen as public artifacts – and not as private artifacts or as private-artifacts-gone-public.³⁹

I refer to videos in which vloggers speak about topics like other users, their videos, YouTube video culture in general or offline topics as **subject clips**. Like in public diary clips, delivery by speech is dominant. Paul Robinett's video reviews (e.g. *Proving Science Wrong! - Renetto Reviews*) and Nate Burr's YouTube tutorials are examples of such videos. Burr also produced several videos about offline topics, like *Flightiquette*. On YouTube the word "rant" is used to refer to emphatic or angry examples of such videos (e.g. *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*). A couple of YouTube 'classics' uploaded after 2006, like *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* (ITSCHRISROCKER) and

³⁹ Obviously, there were also users who created YouTube videos from footage shot in private contexts, but such users were not among the most subscribed users of 2005 and 2006 – and probably less significant in YouTube culture than news media coverage of YouTube suggests (in line with this argument: Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 43). In order to make sense of such videos, processes of selection, dramatization, and an ontologic transformation that happened when users created public videos from private footage would have to be acknowledged (see e.g. Willett, "Camera Phones, Video Production, and Identity" 226).

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GINGERS DO HAVE SOULS!! (COPPERCAB), are subject clips of the rant variety.

The “text-types” argument and description (Chatman 9) interact in most examples of subject clips. In a general sense, public diary clips could also be regarded as subject clips. However, because they are regarded as a specific kind of video by video bloggers themselves (e.g. in BROOKERS, *what is...*), and because narrative tends to be the controlling text-type in these videos, I categorize them separately.

Vloggers also created **parodic performance videos** – videos in which they performed as vloggers or fictional vlogger characters from other channels or as stars or fictional characters from the general cultural realm. Corporeal delivery – voice and rest of the body – dominated over audiovisual delivery in these videos. Vloggers used the terms “parody” and “spoof” for such videos (see also 4.2 ‘Performing an other’).

Vloggers created videos of themselves in specific places or of themselves conducting activities or experiments. I wish to refer to such videos as **self/world documentaries** because they are documenting vloggers and their environment. Unlike in the kinds of videos introduced thus far, audiovisual delivery is more prominent than corporeal delivery. These videos depend on the varied use of cinematography and editing in particular (see chapters 5.1 and 5.2). In videos that document a place, like *Behind the scenes look* (Figs. 5.2.15-17) on MORBECK, description tends to be the controlling text-type; in videos that document an activity, like *Renetto goes TANNING*, narrative predominates (Figs. 2.1.10 and 2.2.1).

There are fundamental differences of narrativity and the techniques used between public diary clips and narrative self/world documentaries which should be pointed out here. All of these videos are narrative works according to Seymour Chatman’s definition of narrative as characterized by a “doubly temporal logic” of “Discourse” and “Story” (Chatman 9), but whereas the voice of the vlogger is the primary tool of narration in public diary clips, audiovisual techniques are the primary tools in self/world documentaries.

In public diary clips a doubly temporal logic is constituted between the events the vlogger is speaking about (the story) and the act of speaking about, of narrating them (discourse). In such videos, vloggers are functioning as narrating performers. Importantly, we do not see the events that are being narrated. This implies that we do not see the narrator as he or she experienced the events either. We only see the narrating ‘I’; the experiencing ‘I’ is reconstructed by the

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narrating 'I' 's speech.⁴⁰ In public diary clips the temporal relationship between the story and the discourse is typically that of a subsequent narration, sometimes that of a prior or predictive narration. Interestingly, public diary clips show many analogies with written fictional or factual narrative texts in this regard. In fiction film (and in many kinds of documentary film), by contrast, there is a tendency for simultaneous narration (Kuhn, *Filmnarratologie* 243).

While there may be occasional narrating performers in narrative self/world documentaries, audiovisual delivery constitutes them as narrative works. Cinematography, editing, and titling constitute a doubly temporal logic between the vlogger's interaction with the world (story) and its presentation in the video (discourse). Unlike in public diary clips, we see images of the narrated events in self/world documentaries. We also see (and hear) the experiencing I. Simultaneous narration is common.

There can be no doubt that many of these events, for example those shown in *Build a Works Bomb* with Renetto, were largely initiated to be documented in a YouTube video in the first place. In the cases of other videos real life plans inspired video projects, but the subsequent documentation imbued the slices of life themselves. Robinett's motivation to visit a tanning studio was to cure oral herpes, but shooting a video of the visit affected his interaction with the studio's assistant and the course of the actual tanning procedure (see p. 158).

In their production of **sketch comedy clips**, vloggers constructed events for comedy's sake using profilmic techniques and audiovisual techniques. Like in self/world documentaries we 'see' events taking place in these videos. However, typically quite different things are happening on the levels of production and representation. In SMOSH's *How Not to Make a First Impression* Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla perform as Adam, a teenager, and Mr. Franklin, his girlfriend's father, during their first meeting (Figs. 2.3.1-2). The teenager makes one faux pas after another until the father throws him out. Popular guides to writing sketch comedy distinguish between "character-based," "situation-based," and "premise-based" sketches (Bent 99). The SMOSH video would probably be an example of a premise-based sketch, the premise being that the teenager is doing everything wrong. Morbeck's

⁴⁰ See Kuhn, following Stanzel, "erlebendes Ich" vs. "erzählendes Ich" (*Filmnarratologie* 355).

2.3 Different Kinds of Videos

The Cat fight, which shows an escalating confrontation between Chipmunk Chick and her assistant Alicia (Figs. 2.1.13-15), would be a character- or situation-based sketch. On the continuum between corporeal and audiovisual delivery, sketch comedy needs to be situated close to the latter pole (Figs. 2.3.1-2).



2.3.1-2 Two subsequent shots from SMOSH's *How not to make a First Impression*. Father: "So what do you think of Amy". Adam: "She is really hot. And her butt: I just wanna smack it."

The two kinds of comedy videos introduced here – parodic performance and sketch comedy – do not encompass all the videos in which comedy plays an important part; in the table I use **miscellaneous comedy** to refer to such videos.

Joost Broeren subdivides "musical display" on YouTube into three "categories": "people lip syncing original recordings of popular songs, people recording their own cover versions of songs by their favorite artists, and people recording their own songs" (159). "Home dance" videos are a "genre" of music videos analyzed by Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier (188) that is not part of Broeren's distinction. My own engagement with musical display on YouTube lead to a distinction between lip sync and home dance music videos on the one side, and musical performance videos on the other. **Lip sync music videos** are videos in which vloggers move their lips in approximate synchronicity with the lyrics of a record (on which somebody else is singing) which is playing on the soundtrack (Fig. 2.1.2). In **home dance music videos** vloggers dance, pose, or jump about in 'response' to such a record (Fig. 2.3.3).

2.3 Different Kinds of Videos

Music videos are typically created after the piece of music for which they are created (and that will provide the sound track for the video) has been recorded. Images are shot and assembled with a “background knowledge” of the music and to be shown alongside the recorded musical piece (Schank 201). Images are meant to ‘work’ with the music. The “organization” of the images with reference to the music (201) concerns mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing. Of course music videos are employing various formal strategies so the music in no way ‘determines’ which images can be seen, for how long, and in which order. The same is true for music videos on vlogs. Nevertheless, the need for a musical piece to be presented with some integrity is simply present in music videos and missing in other videos; and the impact of this need can be found in nearly all dimensions of the eventual video (see p. 255).

Musical performance videos are recordings of musical performances by the vlogger – that is, of the actual production of sounds by the vlogger’s voice and/or musical instruments – of pieces the vlogger may or may not have composed (Fig. 2.3.4). Unlike in the previous two kinds, no record can be heard. Sound and images were recorded at the same time.



2.3.3-4 *Gay God and Alyssa dance to Hellogoodbye (GAYGOD) and Say It's Possible (TERRANAOMI).*⁴¹

⁴¹ See my notes about the aspect ratio of YouTube videos (p. 48).

2.3 Different Kinds of Videos

There are many videos in which vloggers both lip sync and dance. Thus it may make sense to understand lip sync and home dance as activities that can be found in various music videos on YouTube and to reserve 'lip sync music video' and 'home dance music video' to refer to videos, like *Cell block Tango* and *Gay God and Alyssa dance to Hellogoodbye*, in which these activities are the prime ways of responding to a record.

While there is overlap between lip sync and home dance music videos, the line between these music videos and musical performance videos is sharp. Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) and Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) are happy to both home dance and lip sync in their videos but they never sing or play instruments. Vloggers who actually recorded themselves singing and playing instruments – like Amiee Jacobsen (THAUMATA) and Terra Naomi (Fig. 2.3.2) – never lip synced or home danced to records, while they recorded both cover versions and their own songs. Thus I think this distinction is more useful to make sense of music-related videos on YouTube than the one proposed by Broeren.

There are many music videos with records by others on the soundtrack, like SMOSH's *Mortal Kombat Theme* (Fig. 2.1.3-4) and BROOKERS's *Butterfly* (Figs. 5.1.8-14), for which various techniques to 'respond' to a record were used including lip syncing and home dancing. I refer to these as **miscellaneous music videos** in the table that lists the kinds of videos most-common on the channels of the corpus.⁴²

Only the most-common kinds of videos were presented here. Some videos work according to one kind in a one part and according to another kind in another part. Some of the musical performance videos on THAUMATA, for example, are preceded by a diarist introduction (e.g. *an act of drunken aggression on an innocent keyboard*).

All of these kinds bear relations with other kinds of audiovisual formations. YouTube videomakers appropriated, transformed, or mixed such formations. Some audiovisual formations that are common else-

⁴² Music videos for pop songs, musical performance videos of a song not written by the vlogger, video reviews, and parodic performances all 'respond' to other cultural products. If the question of an explicit intertextual relation was the only criterion for distinguishing between kinds of videos, these videos would belong together. Obviously, however, other aspects matter as well.

2.3 Different Kinds of Videos

where do not seem to have an analog formation in video blogging. Documentaries in which the world (and not the world and the vlogger) is the prime interest, non-comical fictional videos, regular music videos (i.e. videos in which both the record and the music video are associated with the same artist (see Menge 192),⁴³ and the oft-mentioned mashup videos of works created in the established media industries (see 1.1 The Research Field, p. 13) were rare on the video blogs of the corpus.

I suggest that the distinctness of video blogging in 2005 and 2006 lied in the specific makeup from different kinds of videos and their relative commonality and the at times complex relationship with formations found elsewhere. I am going to illustrate this with regard to lip sync and home dance videos in chapter 4.3.

It is important to note that most of these kinds of videos can also be found on unacknowledged fictional vlogs. This is why the status of a channel as an unacknowledged fictional vlog is not stated in the same column as the kinds of videos that were uploaded but in an extra column. The creators of LONELYGIRL15 (and of other unacknowledged fictional vlogs) recognized that the audiovisual form they were buying into comprised different kinds of videos. Thus they did not only create public diary clips but also subject clips (*The Tolstoy Principle*), self/world documentaries (e.g. *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*), and a music video (*Grillz feat. Danielbeast, LG15, P. Monkey, and O'n*).

2.4 Stages of Production

The aim of this chapter is to make sense of the ways in which vloggers organized audiovisual production in time. I am going to illustrate how they understood or began to understand production as a process in which different tasks related to and depended on each other. I am also going to illustrate how vloggers worked in terms of the requirements of the video projects they were pursuing.

Bordwell and Thompson describe an industry standard of production, distribution, and exhibition in large-scale filmmaking. Production is subdivided into the phases preparation (or preproduction), shooting (or production in the narrow sense), and assembly (or postproduction) (2-

⁴³ SMOSH wrote and recorded two hip hop tracks for which they also created a music video (e.g. *Boxman*) but these are exceptions in the corpus.

2.4 Stages of Production

41). Relying on this terminology I describe the ‘path’ of a YouTube video with a heuristic of preparation, shooting, postproduction, and distribution/exhibition. This is not to suggest that the fine-grained division of labor of large-scale film production is expected to be found in video blogging; the order of these stages is of a very general kind, and similarly-termed stages have been used to describe diverse audiovisual practices: Alexandra Schneider, for example, uses a succession of preparation (“Vorbereitung”), shooting (“Aufzeichnung”), postproduction (“Postproduktion”), and (private) reception (“Rezeption”) to describe home movie making in the 1930s, where there was no such division of labor (199).

In the following, preparation refers to all activities of the vlogger with regards to the future video that happened before footage was being created. Shooting began when the camera was turned on for the first time to create footage. During postproduction vloggers turned their footage into a video. Distribution/exhibition began with the upload of the video to the vlogger’s YouTube channel.

Preparation

The hypothetical minimal degree of development of the preparation stage would be the vlogger’s decision to shoot a video without any idea about the video to be made. In 2007 Casio introduced a camera with a “YouTube™ Capture Mode” which automatically recorded 15 seconds before a user pressed the record button (CasioUSA). This camera was designed and advertised as the ideal tool to capture “a typical ‘YouTube moment’ worth recording and sharing online” – even when that moment was already over (Müller, “Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video” 126). Setting this camera into “YouTube Capture Mode” would imply the decision to create a video and to decide about a (specific) video project after the recording had already started. Even though 2007 was beyond the scope of my project, I searched for videos in which the 15 second function had actually been used in this manner. The high degree of reflexivity in YouTube culture would have made references to the technology in the context of such videos likely, but I did not find any. YouTube video practices are not necessarily what the platform and video equipment predispose (see similarly Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 24).

I’ve been looking hard to find a video in the corpus in which it was conspicuous that a vlogger had no idea what kind of a video project he

2.4 Stages of Production

or she was pursuing before turning the camera on. At the beginning of such a video we might see a vlogger thinking about what sort of a video to create, very much like the vlogger who Nate Burr constructs (!) in *How to make better videos*: “If one of the first things you say in your video is: ‘I don’t know what to talk about but...’, you probably shouldn’t be making a video.” I could not find such a video in the corpus. Granted, a vlogger might have deleted the footage of the pondering and created a video from the footage in which he had already come up with an idea for a project.

What I found, however, was a video in which it seemed that Paul Robinett (RENETTO) was recording footage for a video and two of his children entered the room and took over to create a different video with him. He edited the footage of the kids’ intrusion into a video he called *I want to make a VIDEO... because I want to be a STAR!* (Fig. 2.4.1). Deciding to create a video was the only preparation Robinett took that turned out to be relevant to the eventual video. The initial video project was discarded, and the project and object of the eventual video were not envisioned before turning the camera on but during shooting and postproduction.



2.4.1 “Can we? Can we? Can we?” Paul Robinett and his ambitious offspring in *I want to make a VIDEO... because I want to be a STAR!* (RENETTO).

Of course the kids’ takeover could be a clever setup by the vlogger – which is beside the point because in that case there would merely be one chance video less in the corpus in which there are virtually no chance videos anyway. The important point is that vloggers typically had an idea about the **video project** they were pursuing and about the

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object of the video to be made before turning the camera on. This degree of preparation seems to be the minimal standard on successful video blogs in 2005 and 2006. It is of course virtually impossible to prove that something has happened before the camera was started to record if all we have as evidence is the recording, but in the case of a couple of one-shot videos it is ‘almost’ possible – or: all other explanations are implausible.



2.4.2-4 Melody Oliveria’s *Weird arms* (BOWIECHICK).

Weird arms is a BOWIECHICK video consisting of a single shot of 27 seconds in which the vlogger shows off the ‘skill’ of bending her arms in an unconventional manner. At the very beginning of the video her eyes are directed at something at an oblique angle from the camera’s lens (Fig. 2.4.2). Her offscreen right hand seems to be reaching to the same direction and dropping something; a dropping sound can be heard. Of course we cannot know for sure, but she appears to have just started the webcam with a mouse via the graphical user interface

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of the camera's software (that she drops or pushes away afterwards) while looking at the computer's screen. This initial gaze off only lasts a fraction of a second, then she addresses viewers via the camera: "People always make fun of the way my arms bend, or they are kind of frightened by it. Hey look!" (Fig. 2.4.3). Then she lifts and bends her left arm, looking off again, probably to control framing on the monitor (Fig. 2.4.4). She ends her brief presentation with a call for responses: "If your arm bends like that, please let me know because I don't want to be the only one." In the last fraction of a second of the video she looks off again, probably to turn off the camera. It is probably uncontroversial that the vlogger already wanted to create a video before starting to record. It is also very plausible that she decided the project of the video would be to show off her skill of bending her arms in a "weird" manner. We might classify the video project as 'presenting a skill' and the video's object as the mentioned skill (see 2.2). A related sub-project would be calling out for response from other users.

The first notes of the track "Bonnie Taylor Shakedown" by Hellogoodbye are playing when the home dance video *Gay God and Alyssa dance to Hellogoodbye* begins. The vlogger Matthew Lush (GAYGOD) is shaking his hips. The camera slightly shakes before coming to a rest, probably on a desk because there is something like a desk top at the bottom of the image. An offscreen voice announces turning up the volume before the volume of the song – obviously playing on a stereo in the same room – actually gets higher. The second participant enters the frame to join the vlogger dancing. The preparation stage for this video comprised the decision to create a video, deciding about the video project (creating a music video for a sound recording/presenting dancing skills), and deciding about the video's object (a Hellogoodbye track) (Figs. 2.3.3 and 2.4.9).

Generally speaking, in the first shot of most videos there already seems to be an idea about a video project and object. In subject clips, for example, the topic is typically mentioned (p. 265). For edited videos and videos in which it is not as obvious as in *Weird arms* and *Hellogoodbye* that the camera was just started to record it would be more difficult (if not impossible) to show that vloggers had such ideas before starting to record footage. In the cases of videos that were shot out of sequence – like the music videos *Hey clip* (TASHA) and *Mortal Kombat Theme* (SMOSH) – this could not be shown either. But then, it would also be difficult to show the opposite: that vloggers did not have an idea what they were doing before pressing the record button. And this notion seems to be what tech companies producing for YouTube users

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imagined YouTube video production to be like in the early days of the platform: “Shoot, easy upload, share” were Casio’s imagined stages of production and circulation by YouTube “directors” (CasioUSA). YouTube’s “Broadcast Yourself” motto did not imply preparation and specific video projects either. This notion was also common among the critics of YouTube’s video culture, like Andrew Keen who claimed many users were just “staring into their computers,” not knowing what they were or should be doing before pressing the button (5).

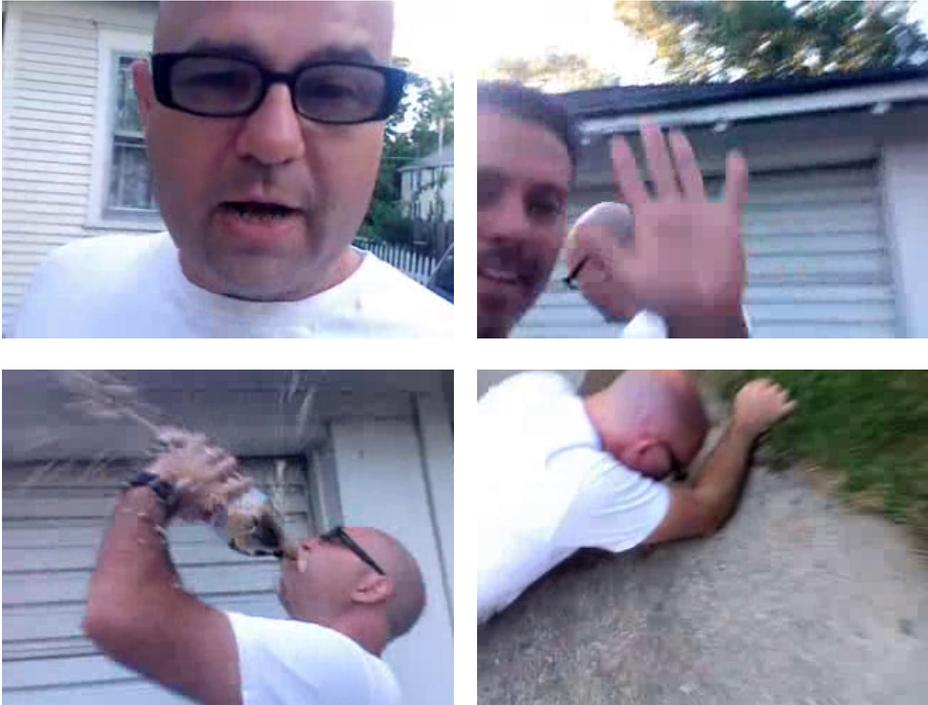
It is relevant in this context that this degree of preparation is recognized by vloggers themselves as important and voiced in prescriptive videos like tutorials. Nate Burr advises: “The most important thing when making a video is to have something to talk about,” that is, be pursuing a specific video project with a specific object, in the case of a subject clip a topic to speak about (*How to make better videos*).

From this base level of preparation – deciding to make a video, deciding about a video project and object –, further degrees of preparedness can be found. The preparation stage could comprise different further tasks.

The preparation stage could include choices about **setting, further participants, costume, make-up, props, and lighting**. Melody and Matthew probably set up the camera in a location they were already in when deciding to make a video: their bedrooms. In the preparation stage of other videos, vloggers changed places. Paul Robinett (RENETTO) – who usually shot indoors – probably chose an outdoors setting for *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human Experiment* because he was about to create a mess: A carbonated drink will develop extreme amounts of foam if brought together with Mentos – for example in an oral cavity (Fig. 2.4.7).⁴⁴ This change of place, then, seems to have been motivated by the nature of the video project. It is likely that Matthew Lush and his friend Alyssa were hanging out and fooling around anyway when they decided to create their home dance video. Paul Robinett’s use of his friend Dave as a camera operator, however, seems to be motivated by the requirements of the video project which did not really allow the vlogger to operate the camera himself while conducting the experiment (Figs. 2.4.5-8). During the vlogger’s spoken introduction Dave was standing ready to be handed the camera (Fig. 2.4.6) to record the actual experiment (Fig. 2.4.7-8).

⁴⁴ See “Diet Coke and Mentos eruption” at *Wikipedia*.

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2.4.5-8 Paul Robinett (RENETTO) and his friend Dave in *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human Experiment*.

While Melody Oliveria probably did not change clothes to record *First Videoblog* and *Weird arms*, Pedro Morbeck's performances of Chipmunk Chick and other characters are probably the best examples of preparation of costume and make-up before shooting (Figs. 2.1.13-15). During the shooting of their home dance video, Lush and his friend decided to use props that were lying around in the same room (Fig. 2.4.9). The use of a ninja sword in Brooke Brodock's lip sync video *Cell block Tango* probably involved preparation. In this one-shot clip the vlogger pulls out a sword from underneath her desk at the moment when she has to lip sync the lyrics of a wife murdering her husband with a knife: "And then he ran into my knife. He ran into my knife ten times" (Fig. 2.1.2).

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2.4.9 Using an object lying around in the room as a ‘microphone’ (*Gay God and Alyssa dance to Hellogoodbye*).

In many videos, vloggers’ **profilmic presentation** was not improvised during shooting but laid out in the preparation stage. The events of eating Mentos and Drinking Diet Coke in Robinett’s video and of pulling a sword in Brodack’s video were obviously planned.

Very typical for public diary clips and subject clips was the preparation of a mental or written list of items to be presented in speech. At the beginning of *How to make better videos* Nate Burr says that he “ha[s] been cruising around on YouTube” and that the “tips” he has for YouTube users are “fresh on [his] mind,” so he is going to present them without further hesitation. At the beginning of *Lets just call this one Fagsus 2* he says: “If you see my eyes wandering offscreen, its because I’ve written down a few things that I don’t want to forget.” This device can probably be traced back to the use of key notes for public presentations in various contexts – and not to private everyday creativity (cf. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 13).

The typicality of preparing the presentation in such a manner in video blogging is suggested by the fact that it is picked up on unacknowledged fictional video blogs: Cynthia, the vlogger character of LITTLELOCA for example, holds up a paper list with items she wants to speak about at the beginning of the sex education video *Teen Sex*,

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Pregnancy, STD's (Fig. 2.4.10). A production device from regular video blogs thus became part of the framed situation of production that was emulated on an unacknowledged fictional vlog.



2.4.10 “I made a list:” Cynthia, the vlogger character of LITTLELOCA.

Lists were a manner of preparing content and structure of a presentation in a rough manner whereas most of the words were probably improvised during the presentation itself. Lines were prepared to be reproduced by the performers for – it appears – a smaller number of videos. In *To the fans and haters* Morbeck says that he writes scripts for his videos which among other things implies preparing lines. In *Video Outtakes* we see multiple attempts to present an exact wording (see 4.4 The Representation of Accidents, p. 208). *The Cat fight* is among the videos prepared in this detailed manner. An interesting case are lip sync music videos because all the words to be mouthed during shooting are predetermined by the vlogger’s choice of a record. If vloggers did not already know the lyrics by heart, memorizing them had to be part of the preparation. When performing for *Cell block Tango*, Brodack knew most of the lyrics by heart, but she also seems to have them as a hardcopy or displayed on a computer screen to her left since she glances off in that direction several times during the video (Fig. 2.4.11).

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2.4.11 “Not only was he married, oh no: He had six wives – one of those Mormons, you know” (BROOKERS, *Cell block Tango*).

Apart from deciding about video projects and objects, and the preparation of profilmic space and events, the preparation stage could comprise thinking about **cinematography, editing, compositing, sound editing and mixing, visual and audio effects, and titles**. This means that preparation did not only involve planning the shooting stage but can also involve planning postproduction.

Several videos were prepared as a sequence of discrete shots in advance. That is, it appears that there was an integrated concept for mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing aimed at creating a succession of shots that differed in terms of what they showed and how. Because they were all played by the same performer, the footage for the shots showing Chipmunk Chick, Alicia, and the vlogger as himself in *The Cat fight* had to be created out of sequence (Figs. 2.1.13-15). That is, Morbeck dressed up to perform as one of them, shot the footage for all the respective shots, changed costume and make-up, shot the footage for the second group of shots, changed costume and make-up again, and shot the third group. The three different positions of the performer and the camera with reference to the green plastic screen suggest the presence of the two characters and their creator in the same room and their positions with reference to each other. The direction of offscreen gazes is consistent with these positions. The dialogue and the gaze in each shot of the finished video implicate those of the preceding and following. Such a system of shots could not have been created during the shooting stage only.

The production of *The Cat fight* indicates the high degree of awareness vloggers who turned out successful had of how audiovisual tech-

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niques relate to and depend on each other. It also shows how a vlogger used this knowledge to produce a video in an unconventional manner. This unconventional mode of production – like Robinett’s use of Dave as a camera operator in *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human Experiment* – was a response to the scarcity of personnel. One of the pleasures of watching *The Cat fight* is seeing audiovisual techniques at work: The mixture of simple means and ingenuity is intriguing. It is both an illusion that we are witnessing (the Kuleshov effect among others), and an illusion-in-the-making.

Sound editing and mixing were arranged for during the preparation stage of some videos. In *Smosh Short 2: Stranded* we see a castaway character writing diary on a deserted island without speaking – and hear the words he his writing as a voiceover. Shooting the footage of the writing only made sense if a voiceover was meant to be recorded during postproduction from the very beginning. The writing and the other activities of the castaway correspond neatly to the lines of the voiceover.



2.4.12 “Thanks to the waterproof notebook I keep in my pocket I will keep a journal of the events I must overcome on this island.” Anthony Padilla plays a castaway in *Smosh Short 2: Stranded* (SMOSH).

Equivalent examples could be provided here for visual and sound effects and for titles, but the overall point should be clear by now: In the preparation stage an overall concept for the video to be made was devised. This involved deciding about a video project and object in virtually all cases. It comprised decisions with regards to the mise-en-scene – setting, profilmic presentation, make-up, props, or lighting – in

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most videos. For a smaller number of videos cinematography, editing, sound editing and mixing, visual and sound effects, and titles were thought about in advance. This involved thinking about the different tasks as related and dependent on each other. A high degree of elaboration of the preparation stage is also what Nate Burr recommended in *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*: “The best way, in my view, is to make a genuinely entertaining video that is well-thought out, probably planned in advance. People will watch, people will enjoy, people will subscribe.”

Shooting

The shooting stage – the second stage in the heuristic of four consecutive stages – began when the camera was turned on for the first time to create footage for the video. **Performing in front of the camera** and **creating audiovisual footage with the camera** were the two central tasks of this stage.

A personal union of performing, producing, and uploading characterized video blogging. It can be made sense of in terms of a scarcity of personnel: Vloggers fulfilled different tasks because they were on their own. The implications of the link surfaced especially during the stage in which audiovisual footage was created – the shooting stage – because the same person (or small group of people) that was meant to become a part of the footage was also responsible for its creation. Some production tasks could be executed in sequence instead of at the same time, for example in the case of Morbeck’s how-to-create-several-characters-with-only-one-performer problem. Labor from the shooting stage was delegated to the preparation and postproduction stages in this case. In the case of other implications, this was not possible: In order to create mobile framings, vloggers working on their own had to handhold the camera which limited their options for performing because one hand was occupied; the range of possible camera distances was limited in this situation as well. Because the vlogger and his environment, and events as they were unfolding were recorded for narrative self/world documentaries, cinematography was a challenge especially in the production of these videos. Such issues do not arise in live action production for film and television because there is a division of labor.

Single camera setups appear to have been the standard. Image and sound were typically recorded at the same time and with the same

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device. In most cases it is impossible to tell if a given shot was the result of a single or of multiple takes. However, we have indications of both single and multiple take approaches. It is unlikely that Brooke Brodack opened her Christmas presents of 2005 more than one time (BROOKERS, *Christmas morning*). In a few instances we know that multiple takes were made because vloggers edited discarded takes from the production of one or several videos into a separate video (e.g. MORBECK, *Video Outtakes*).

In chapter 3.3 I will analyze vlogger's multitasking during the shooting stage in detail. Cinematography under scarcity is the focus of chapter 5.1.

Apart from the two central tasks, **other tasks** could be part of the shooting stage. Decisions about costume and props – what James Naremore refers to as the “accessories” of performance (83) – were not only made during the preparation stage, they were also be made while recording a take or in between takes. In a few videos we witness vloggers' spontaneous use of objects from their vicinity (Fig. 2.4.9). I already mentioned vloggers' creation of lists to prepare their profilmic presentation in public diary and subject clips. A different tactic – one in which the shooting stage was comparatively more important – was to adlib the presentation with the video project and object in mind. Most of the public diary clips on BOWIECHICK (e.g. *First Videoblog*) seem to have been created in this manner. Planning a video as a sequence of discrete shots in advance was a mode of production with an emphasis on the preparation stage. In other videos it seems that vloggers were working from shot to shot, that is, deciding about what to shoot next and how during the shooting stage. This mode was prominent in self/world documentaries. It appears that Paul Robinett did not have a very concrete idea about what to expect in the tanning studio when entering (see chapter 3.3 in detail). Such an approach could involve ‘cutting in the head,’ that is, thinking about necessary shots and their order during shooting.

Postproduction

During postproduction vloggers turned their footage into a video. Transfer of the footage from the camera to a computer with appropriate software was needed for all footage that was recorded on a camera's own storage medium and not on a computer itself.

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Editing was the task that constituted most of vloggers' work of the postproduction stage. Editing is the elimination of "unwanted footage" by "discarding all but the best take," trimming the chosen take, and subsequently ordering and joining the selected and trimmed pieces of footage "the end of one to the beginning of another" (Bordwell and Thompson 294). From the footage the shots of the video emerged as a result of these activities.

Compositing typically required concerted work in different production stages (see Flückiger 24-25). In the postproduction stage composite shots were created from the recorded footage (see Fig. 2.2.2).

Unlike in large-scale filmmaking (see Bordwell and Thompson 32), speech and noises in videos on vlogs typically stemmed from the shooting stage. While it was uncommon to replace location sound with audio recorded during postproduction, **further audio** was commonly added: The voice-over in *Stranded* (SMOSH) would be an example; for *Brookers News* a jingle was added.

The **visual and sound effects** provided by the software were used for some videos. Visual effects were common in music videos like *Little Wonder* on BOWIECHICK and *Butterfly* on BROOKERS (see Figs. 5.1.11-12 and 6.1.13). Pedro Morbeck used pitch shifting to create female characters, such as Chipmunk Chick and Alicia, in *The Cat fight* and other videos.

Titles (i.e. written language) were very common. Text overlaid images (Fig. 2.4.13) or was displayed on more or less neutral background graphics (Fig. 2.1.19). In a few instances a camera image was embedded in such graphics (Fig. 2.4.14). Titles could be static or animated. Titles were an important technique to begin and end a video. As such, they could be part of larger opening and closing title sequences consisting of camera images, graphics, music and other audio (see chapter 6.1). Titles also appeared in other parts of videos, for example to emphasize the structure of a video, to add something a vlogger forgot during shooting, or even to add another 'voice' that commented on the images (Fig. 2.4.13).

Just like in the shooting stage, in postproduction changes to the plans a vlogger had for a video could be effected: A video project evolved through the stages.

Because he was not happy with the footage he shot, Tony Huynh added a "Special Director's Commentary" version in postproduction which effectively doubled the length of *The Delaware Boy*. He used

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voice-over and titles to comment on his performance and other attributes of the footage. From the failed project of documenting a 'haunted' forest became a highly self-reflexive video about shooting such a documentary.

Apparently Melody Oliveria found a section of the footage for *First Videoblog* in which she reads out the inscriptions her classmates made onto her shoes lengthy or digressive because she applied a fast motion effect in postproduction which also increased the pitch of her voice. She superimposed a title that reflected on this procedure (Fig. 2.4.13). When postproducing the video, she also added a title card which temporarily embedded the camera image to make room for a message for her boyfriend (Fig. 2.4.14). In this part of the account of her day she had talked about him: "And then after school my boyfriend Aaron came over."



2.4.13-14 Postproduction as a further stage of the 'evolution' and – possibly – transformation of a video project: Two different uses of titles in *First Videoblog* (BOWIECHICK).

While the same people were responsible for all tasks of production, we can conceive of the audiovisual agency as split with regards to stages of production. The agency the vlogger exerted through profilmic activities and cinematography operated at the same time. Editing, titles, and other techniques of postproduction happened at a later time. The decisions of the shooting stage were to a certain extent revised or superseded by the decisions of postproduction. The profilmic I of *First Videoblog* did not know about and could not interfere with the actions of the postproducing I with regards to the footage of her presentation. Nevertheless, in the case of a live action video, having footage to work

2.4 Stages of Production

on was a necessary condition, so the second half of the audiovisual agency was not totally independent of the first.

In video blogging in 2005 and 2006, there were two discrete ways of producing music videos with nothing much in between. The music that can be heard in the first group is location sound from the shooting stage. The music in the second group is a sound recording added in postproduction.

It is safe to assume that in the shooting stage of virtually all music videos that vloggers produced, the record for which a music video was meant to be created could be heard in the profilmic situation, that is, it was played on a stereo or other device. The use of hearing the record while performing is obvious: It keyed lip syncing, dancing, and other ways of responding to the music. The consumer equipment used by most vloggers recorded a sound track along with the image track by default. The record playing in the profilmic situation was thus re-recorded during shooting. In the postproduction stage of the first group of music videos this location sound was preserved and ended up as the soundtrack of the eventual music video.

When postproducing music videos of the second group, the sound track created during shooting was discarded and replaced with the audio of the record. The relationship of these production protocols with audiovisual form and sound quality is profound: Music videos produced in the first manner are typically one-shot clips with a comparatively low sound quality due to generation loss. Those produced in the second typically sport illustration editing (see chapter 5.2) and have a comparatively high sound quality. Production in the first mode was very time-efficient, while the limited options for editing and sound quality were a trade-off.

Distribution/Exhibition

Distribution/Exhibition was the stage in the 'life' of a video that began with the upload of the video to the vlogger's YouTube channel. In chapter 7 this stage is explored, but I want to deal with the transition between production and distribution/exhibition and with vloggers' tasks during this transition here. I also want to make a couple of points with regards to arguments that have been made about online collaboration and an ongoing transformation of YouTube videos on the platform.

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The **decision to upload a video** initiated its distribution and exhibition. For every one of their videos, vloggers made such a decision – even if this decision was only implied by the act of uploading itself. It is safe to assume that many video projects were aborted at some point during production, possibly even videos whose production was complete (see also Willett, “Camera Phones, Video Production, and Identity” 226).

The **choice of a video title** was a second fundamental decision of the transition between production and distribution/exhibition. As previously mentioned, YouTube’s interface required an uploading user to supply a title which would be displayed on top of the video player. A video description and tags were optional.

Burgess and Green correctly point out that the YouTube interface does not support online collaboration: “[T]here are no overt invitations to collaborate with other users, or to remix or quote each other’s videos. [...] YouTube’s architecture and design invite individual participation, rather than collaborative activity” (65). Nevertheless, they still refer to YouTube as a “co-creative environment” (82). They found “collaborative and remixed vlog entries” to be “a very noticeable feature of the most popular content in [their] survey” conducted in late 2007 (64-65). Nevertheless, the only example of a collaborative video the authors provide did not come about on YouTube but on another website and was posted there (65). In the present study of early contributors of videos, online collaborations were an exception (p. 257), while offline collaboration – such as that of two sisters or friends creating a video together – was common (e.g. BROOKERS and SMOSH). Such offline collaboration within existing local social networks (see Buckingham, “Power to the People?” 234) did not feature in conceptualizations of YouTube videomaking as a collaborative or social phenomenon (Burgess and Green 64-65; also Strangelove 186-187). Actual cases of offline collaboration make the scant evidence of online collaboration look even scantier – and thus call the argument about a collaborative online culture into question.

The three stages of production were very dynamic: A video project changed throughout production. How much further transformation was possible after a video had been uploaded? Video descriptions and tags could be changed. The video itself, the upload date, and the user name a video was attributed to could not be changed in 2005, 2006,

2.4 Stages of Production

and beyond. YouTube did not allow users to continue working on their videos once they were uploaded. The interface did not allow users to upload different versions of a video either. What is more important: There are no cases in the corpus in which users titled a video in a manner that suggests it was a first or a second version. Once a video was uploaded, it was finished and out there in the public.

Other users' tricking of the interface to download a video, remix it, and upload it as a distinct and different video to a distinct and different user account (cf. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 65; Marek 75-76) is a completely different issue.⁴⁵ Unlike Roman Marek claims (76), such activities do not affect the initially uploaded video itself. Thus Marek's conceptualization of the life of YouTube videos on the platform as "circulation" (75) is counter-intuitive.

While there was a lot of transformation during production, images and sounds became stable audiovisual objects through uploading at the latest. Apart from the ways in which the YouTube interface primarily coded relationships between distributor/exhibitors and viewers of videos (see chapter 1.2), the stable character of YouTube videos suggests that distribution/exhibition is a fitting term to refer to the stage in the 'life' of a video that followed the three stages of production.

⁴⁵ Burgess and Green spearhead both "collaborative and remixed" videos as indicators of "collaborative production" on YouTube (64-65). However, such videos fundamentally differ in terms of production and creative agency. In the production of a collaborative video, different people work together to create a video. In the production of a remix video, one person takes one or more videos created by others – with or without their knowing or permission – and uses them as material to create a 'new' video (Sonvilla-Weiss 1). Individual creativity and intertextuality instead of "collaborative production" seem to be adequate framings to make sense of the latter videos.

Conclusion: An Audiovisual Practice

Audiovisual production for YouTube distribution and exhibition is a fact; and it needs to be studied (Buckingham, "Power to the People?" 237). This chapter responded to the gap in the research thus far of thoroughly engaging with video production for YouTube upload.

I have shown that the creation of videos was an activity that early contributors of YouTube videos who turned out to be successful on the platform – video bloggers and the creators of unacknowledged fictional vlogs – regarded as central in their use of the service: They used YouTube to show their videos while they could have used it otherwise or used a platform where social networking was prominent. Many of them self-identified as creators of videos. The introduction of the users from the core corpus aimed at valuing individuality instead of generalization: Only a few of them could be described with the terms 'amateur' and 'professional' in an uncomplicated way. The main finding of my more systematic examination of users' creative and media backgrounds when beginning to use the platform was the salient extent of contribution by people with a background in audiovisual or music production from the very early days of the platform on. A significant number of users that were already publicly showing their work in other offline or online contexts stood out.

The video bloggers of the corpus pursued specific video projects. They envisioned video projects and objects before they turned on the camera for the first time. As I am going to show in the next chapters, decisions about setting, the profilmic presentation, the use of audiovisual techniques, and distribution/exhibition depended on these projects and objects. Such decisions also depended on the scarcity which was an economic condition of YouTube videomaking in 2005 and 2006. Among other scarcities, the scarcity of personnel in front of and behind the camera was fundamental for the ways in which video production played out.

Vloggers' overall high degree of awareness about the ways in which tasks of production relate to and depend on each other was conspicuous. This was especially the case in videos in which vloggers used techniques in an idiosyncratic manner to realize video projects in the context of scarcity; Pedro Morbeck's performance as different characters in *The Cat fight* and *YouTube Don'ts* would be prime examples.

Commonly, video blogging is seen as a practice of "communication" and social networking between users (e.g. Burgess and Green, *You-*

Conclusion: An Audiovisual Practice

Tube 54; Harley and Fitzpatrick 681). The most important overarching finding of this chapter was that video blogging emerged as an audiovisual practice. This was demonstrated through the analysis of the organization of production in time: Video bloggers, who turned out successful on YouTube, efficiently and creatively dealt with questions of how to use equipment, of the creation of a mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, titling; they also made decisions to publicly show videos to viewers, and – as we will see in chapter 7.3 – decisions to promote them. It would be too much to say that video blogging was only an audiovisual practice (see chapter 7.1). However, the motivations and use of the platform by the vloggers from the corpus certainly suggest that it was also an audiovisual practice.

3 Setting and Vlogger

This chapter is largely concerned with “profilmic space” and the “profilmic event[s]” of video blogging, that is, with what was put “in front of” the camera (Kuhn and Westwell, “Profilmic Event (profilmic Space)”). Settings are approached in the first part (3.1). In the second part I illustrate that enactment was only one of several functions fulfilled by the vlogger’s body in video blogging (3.2). In the final part I deal with vloggers’ shared or multiple attention during the shooting stage (3.3).

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging’s Settings

The two principal ways to “control setting” in live action audiovisual practices are to choose “an already existing locale” and “to construct the setting” (Bordwell and Thompson 179). The use of existing locales predominates on the video blogs from the corpus, and its study will contribute the larger part to this chapter.

The settings appear to follow an expansive outward movement from bedrooms to other settings in the home, to local and regional settings, to Los Angeles, the center of the American entertainment industry. Following this movement, the analysis will fathom motivations for and significance of settings and of their expansive movement.

In objection to the private-gone-public argument I am going to show that existing locales in the home – including bedrooms – were by no means private in an uncomplicated way.

In the final section ‘neutralized’ settings and the creation of virtual settings through compositing will come into view, and the study of setting thus briefly moves from profilmic to filmic space.

The bedroom

The setting of Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla’s early music videos and of several later videos was Padilla’s bedroom in his parents’ house (Figs. 2.1.3-4). Melody Oliveria aka. BOWIECHICK also primarily used her bedroom as a setting (Figs. 2.1.7-8 and 3.1.1). The creators of LONELYGIRL15 recognized the bedroom as an important setting of

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

video blogging and reaffirmed its status in making it the prime setting of Bree's videos during the first couple of months of the project (Figs. 2.1.16 and 3.1.2). News media pieces do not forget to mention that YouTube videos tend to be shot in young people's bedrooms and thus seem to notice this setting as specific and significant (see e.g. Hefferman; Kornblum, "Now Playing on YouTube") – even to the extent that Brooke Brodack, for whom the bedroom was one setting among others in the house from her earliest videos on (see e.g. *EmoSpace*), is said to be performing in her bedroom mostly (Kornblum, "Now Playing on YouTube"). YouTube researchers dwell on the teenage or young adult bedroom as a setting as well (Burgess 107; Peters and Seier 193; Strangelove 40). The bedroom thus seems to hold a special status among all other settings in early video blogging.

Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier note that YouTube videos display "an endless series of private spaces, especially teenager's bedrooms" and that "the interiors usually attest to a certain average taste" (192). However, we should not forget that teenagers' bedrooms are places of representation: Teenagers decorate their rooms the way they like with posters of favorite stars, photographs of friends, and souvenirs. Their rooms are places of identification, distinction, and representation. Already without arranging the room for shooting and the mediation of the camera and YouTube, there is a private local audience of these rooms: the vloggers, their friends, and parents. Above Oliveria's bed there are posters of David Bowie and a Halloween souvenir; she explicitly introduces them to her YouTube viewers in *My room*. Above Padilla's bed other posters, on the adjacent wall several dozen CDs or DVDs with their shiny sides showing up (Figs. 2.1.3-4). What may appear as an "average taste" from an adult perspective, contains specific markers of distinction for teenagers and young adults.

It is no surprise that the private-gone-public argument crystallized around the use of bedrooms as settings. According to Peters and Seier the "private spaces" of bedrooms are "often simply [shown] as they are" (192). Michael Strangelove is perhaps the most-vocal proponent of the argument: YouTube "tempts young people to bring the world into their bedrooms when it might be better to keep the door shut and the camera off. [...] YouTube provides us with a window into the home" (40). His social and political reading of what YouTube 'does' is harsh: The platform "invades our privacy, erodes our autonomy, and threatens essential social dynamics such as the need for moments of private

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

non-compliance. [...] It may also be changing our children's identity and their future prospects" (63). Strangelove underestimates or even ignores users' agency of representing their world and their very own decision of uploading videos.

The coincidence of the increasing availability of cheap cameras and software, of free tools of public distribution like YouTube, and of the use of the home as a setting for public cultural production fueled the private-gone-public argument. However, as Rebekah Willett has shown in her study of young people's use of camera phones, production for circulation within the family and small circles of friends – private reception that is – not only survived the revolution of tools of production and distribution, it still seems to be the default for most videos created (226; see also Pini 81). It goes without saying that these private videos cannot be found (by researchers and others) among the videos publicly shown on YouTube, but that does not mean they do not exist.

In this context it is important to repeat that the YouTube videos in the corpus were clearly produced to be publicly shown on YouTube or on another public outlet.⁴⁶ It is problematic to assume that anything in videos produced for public distribution and exhibition – including the setting – is essentially private. And the privacy of something in such a video would be impossible to prove – but then, Strangelove and other proponents of the argument do not go to such pains: A bed is simply taken as a symptom of privacy in the argument.

Moving from the ontologic objection to production, it needs to be said that it is certainly possible that vloggers prepared their rooms for public representation before turning the camera on – even if these rooms still look 'private' to us. The preparation stage in the production of many videos may in fact have involved tidying up, putting things away or out. The fact that we do not see such preparation in the uploaded videos is self-evident, but that does not mean that it did not happen.

Prepared and unprepared rooms could be manipulated during the profilmic presentation; they could serve as pools for props for example. Matthew Lush's untidy room is put into the scene (which is, of course, the literal translation for *mise-en-scène*) in this manner in his home

⁴⁶ See my introduction of the users from the core corpus (pp. 64-72) and of the public diary clip (p. 102).

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

dance videos (Fig. 2.4.9). Videos in which vloggers show us around their room and introduce us to furniture and decorations epitomize the fact that these were not only spaces of performance but also performed spaces (e.g. BOWIECHICK, *My Room*).

Of course cinematography matters when it comes to the representation of a bedroom and of other locations. It is conspicuous how vloggers used framing to show some parts of the room and conceal others. It does not seem to be a coincidence that the mise-en-scene in BOWIECHICK's *First Videoblog* is so orderly and organized, centrally placing the vlogger in front of her bed with the wall decorations also in view (Fig. 2.1.7). In a shot from *Mortal Kombat Theme* Ian Hecox is standing with his back to the corner, the decorated walls to his sides (Fig. 2.1.4), while other parts of the room are strategically offscreen, such as a functional (and not decorative) clothes rail to the right of the discs that we never see in full in SMOSH videos. Bedrooms like other settings in video blogging, then, were neither private nor "simply" shown "as they are" (cf. Peters and Seier 192).

After vlogging for several months, Melody Oliveria moved around the furniture of her bedroom and presented the new arrangement to her viewers in the video *Welly Welly Welly Welly Well* (Fig. 3.1.3). Nate Burr offers a remark about vloggers' possible impetus for such changes: "[T]hey wanna try something different, you know. They might get bored or consider their viewers are getting bored by just watching a blog that has the same damn background all the time" (*Driving Insanity*). By rearranging the bedroom, then, vloggers created variety within the emerging conventions of video blogging. Such tactics signal the high degree of reflection that characterized video blogging. Conventions, such as the bedroom setting, and their limitations were reflected on even during their very emergence. Variation and innovation were vloggers' responses.

Appropriating the tactic, the vlogger character Bree (LONELYGIRL15) redecorated her room three days after the BOWIECHICK video was updecoded (Fig. 3.1.2). Unlike in the former video, however, the transformation of the room itself was presented in the video: as a fast-motion sequence accompanied by non-diegetic music (*Daniel Returns, and More Interesting Factoids (Yay!)*). Thereby the producers of LONELYGIRL15 achieved a heightened sense of transformation of profilmic space.

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings



3.1.1-2 Melody Oliveria: “My desk used to be right there.” Bree:
“Today I’m gonna move a few things from this side of the room
to that side of the room”.

Other settings in the home

An obvious tactic to create variety was to shoot videos in different locations, for example in other parts of the home: in other rooms or the garden. Instead of using his bedroom like in his first two videos, Matthew Lush shot a series of lip sync videos in his bathroom (e.g. *Gay God sings [sic] to Janet Jackson : All For You*). There does not seem to be a reason why the bathroom and not another room was used in these videos. Creating video projects with a different setting thus seems to be the response to the desire for variety in these cases.

Other changes of setting were motivated by the specific requirements of a video project. The creation of variety was a welcome side result in these cases. Lush used the kitchen for the cooking video *Gay God with friend Alyssa and VEGAN COOKIES!*. A chat between a father and his daughter’s date required a setting other than a bedroom; SMOSH used a kitchen for the sketch comedy video *How Not to Make a First Impression* (Figs. 2.3.1-2). Paul Robinett shot *Diet Coke +Mentos=Human experiment* in the garden because the video project involved a foaming sticky liquid (see Figs. 2.4.5-8). These moves were obvious but necessary choices to produce the respective videos.

Use of other parts of the home of course necessitated that they were free to use. In the storyworld of LONELYGIRL15, Bree has restrictive parents that occupy the other rooms of the house. Her father appears only once in the series, standing on the doorstep of her room to call

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

her friend Daniel out for a “chat” (*The Tolstoy Principle (and Dad talks to Daniel)*). The doorstep that he does not cross and that Daniel has to cross to be subjected to his diction seems to separate different spheres – Bree’s and her parents’ – inside the house. It is coherent with reference to the story that we never see Bree use other rooms of the house. Brooke and her sister Melissa used the whole house to shoot the BROOKERS videos from the onset. This was probably possible because their father was dead and their mother working.⁴⁷ Watching Brooke’s excessive and expansive performance we cannot but think of this as a ‘home alone’ situation, where spatial and other limits have disappeared (Figs. 2.1.1). Nevertheless, the notion of a young person’s embattled enclave in the house is nowhere as explicit as on LONELYGIRL15. Video bloggers’ use of settings, then, was picked up, condensed, and imbued with significance for the story on this unacknowledged fictional video blog.

Paul Robinett was living with his wife and three children and used different rooms and the garden of their house throughout.

Local and regional settings

Vloggers also shot videos in their neighborhood and in their local or regional environment. Some of the footage for *Butterfly* (BROOKERS) music video was shot at home; more footage was shot on a local playground. The new setting obviously offered new activities for the performers – and by implication visual variety for viewers (see Fig. 3.1.3). *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* (SMOSH) was shot in Padilla’s bedroom and a local forest. Hecox and Padilla shot *The Best Car EVER*, a sketch in which a car dealer tries to sell a regular car as a racing car, in the streets of the Sacramento suburb they were living in.

Like in those instances where vloggers moved from the bedroom to other parts of the home, changes of setting for mere variety (e.g. *Butterfly*) and changes motivated by specific video projects (e.g. *The Best Car EVER*) can be found. There was also a third option. Paul Robinett went downtown to a tanning studio to go tanning – and brought his laptop along to shoot a video documenting the procedure

⁴⁷ Brodack shares these details about her family situation in *Everything Changes*.

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(*Renetto goes TANNING*). In the case of this RENETTO video, life, if you will, motivated leaving the home. A video project was inspired by the plan to go to the studio.



3.1.3 Brooke Brodack's friend Ben in *Butterfly* dangling from a rack on a playground.

In a story about a home-schooled girl with restrictive religious parents, leaving the domestic sphere of course holds a special status. Bree's plan to go hiking with Daniel has to be postponed once, but the trip is made a video project and 'documented' in *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!* when it can eventually take place. Predictably, sneaking out for a party in *I'm Going to the Party!* is followed by *House Arrest*.

Los Angeles, California

In spring 2006 Hecox and Padilla drove from their Northern Californian home to Los Angeles "for business and pleasure." In the two-part *A Day in the Life of Smosh- LA Edition*, released on their secondary channel IANH, they tell of "meetings" with people from the media industry and how they hope that "something comes out of" them. They also speak about plans to go to Santa Monica Beach to shoot two videos, videos which were released as *Smosh Short 2: Stranded* and *The California Stereotype Experiment* on SMOSH a couple of weeks later. Professional and private life brought about a change of place for Hecox and Padilla; and they took the camera along and envisioned three video projects that benefited from the change of place and turned it into video settings.

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

In May and June 2006 people who were already trying to get a foot into the industry and based in Los Angeles started YouTube projects. Lisa Donovan was an actress who discovered YouTube during this time. *LisaNova takes the Bus* and *It was a long Hot ride so I took a Dip!!!* have distinctive LA settings; the former is even accompanied by Randy Newman's "I Love LA" on the soundtrack.

YouTube received attention from established companies in spring and summer 2006 (see Clark; Goo). Individual vloggers like BROOKERS and SMOSH had meetings or even struck deals, for example, to produce content for other outlets (Martin). People from the margins of the industry opened YouTube channels as well. It seems only natural that LA settings increasingly appeared on video blogs.

Vloggers' location in the home or in a specific part of the home is far more tangible than a location in the United States or elsewhere on the globe. Vloggers rarely mention the name of the town or city they are living in; Lisa Donovan is an exception in this regard. Hecox and Padilla mention Los Angeles when they drive there but they never mention the name of their home town, which is only known from press sources (e.g. Kornblum). When Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) shows her neighborhood this merely seems to be to situate 'her' home in 'her' neighborhood rather than in a neighborhood in a town or city identified or identifiable by name (*The driver should be on his way*). Safety concerns are important in this context but this seems to be only part of the answer since American vloggers also rarely mentioned the state they were living in which would to a large degree have retained their privacy.

Some time after LONELYGIRL15 was found out, the creators gave up Bree's parents' house as a setting. When, in the story, Bree's parents are abducted by members of the cult they are involved in, Bree and Daniel have to leave the house because they fear that the same fate might strike them. They drive around and stay in various motels. A viewer familiar with the region may recognize Southern Californian landscape and cityscape (e.g. *On the Run*). The reason is, of course, that the whole production was based in "the greater Los Angeles area" (Rushfield and Hoffman, "Lonelygirl15 Video Blog Is Brainchild of 3 Filmmakers"). In correspondence with the all-American storyworld of the project and the curious state of the home in video blogging, however, the profilmic locale is never identified as Greater Los Angeles. Strictly speaking, it is not the place the story is set.

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

A vloggers' home – with the bedroom as its prime setting and the neighborhood as its surroundings – is a setting that is both distinct and similar to that used by other vloggers. It is in many ways a generic place that seems to exist without being located in a specific town or city.

'Neutral' and constructed settings

Thus far, videos were discussed for which vloggers used existing locales as settings; to some extent they were manipulated, but largely they remained identifiable as bedrooms, kitchens, gardens, or tanning studios. There are, however, also several videos for which vloggers neutralized existing locations. In the RENETTO video *This Is YouTube at its best!* we can only guess what kind of a room the vlogger is in because he is in close up in front of a dark and unobtrusive background, possibly a set of stairs (Fig. 3.1.4). For *Renetto... The Rambling Story of My Life. So Far...* the vlogger used a dark background and lit himself up in a manner that makes the background turn into a uniform black, so we cannot see any surface structure of the background anymore (Fig. 3.1.5).



2.1.4-5 Paul Robinett neutralized existing locales for two of his RENETTO videos.

Constructed settings (Bordwell and Thompson 179) were uncommon in video blogging in 2005 and 2006. The scarcities of money and time were probably the main reason for this. The producers of LONELYGIRL15 did not fully construct a setting either but decorated the apartment of one of them in a “girly” manner (Davis).

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

Probably because constructing a profilmic setting was more expensive and time-consuming than creating a virtual mise-en-scene through compositing, the latter technique was in effect as common as the former. Morbeck created traveling mattes of himself for several videos using the blue screen that is shown in *Behind the scenes look* (Fig. 3.1.6). For *My Real Sex* a traveling matte of Morbeck performing as Chipmunk Chick was superimposed onto a still image of a swimming pool (Fig. 3.1.7).⁴⁸



3.1.6-7 Morbeck's *Behind the scenes look*: "And I set up a blue screen here so that I can make those chroma key effects." The use of the screen in a composite shot from *My Real Sex*.

Settings in conclusion

What was the function of the bedroom in video blogging in 2005 and 2006? In contrast with the notion of "private spaces" that were "simply" shown "as they are" (Peters and Seier 192), I suggest that the bedroom was a location that was willingly, consciously, and performatively put into the scene in video blogs. It was a location that offered its own materiality and meanings for adoption or manipulation; it also func-

⁴⁸ In compositing the manipulation of profilmic space intertwines with cinematography and postproduction. We 'see' a situation for which there was no analog situation in profilmic space. In the composite shot a virtual space is constructed from footage of two separate situations shot in two separate locales (see Flückiger 23-24).

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

tioned as a stage waiting for something to happen: for the vlogger's appearance, which comes into view in the next chapter.

Besides its function as a setting – that is, as something that was put in front of a camera and shown in a video – the bedroom also functioned as the prime site of production of the audiovisual practice: as a studio and as an editing room. The materiality of his bedroom was deemphasized in Morbeck's Chipmunk Chick videos (Fig. 3.1.7). Its function as a site of production became visible in *Behind the scenes look* (Fig. 3.1.6). Especially teenage and young adult vloggers still living with their parents postproduced their videos on their computers in their bedrooms, even if the footage was shot in other locations (e.g. THEWINEKONE).

My analysis makes sense of vloggers' choices of setting in terms of an expansive movement with the bedroom as its starting point. Interestingly, however, there are vloggers in the corpus who seem to only have 'discovered' the domestic setting after producing videos for a while. Joining YouTube in December 2005, Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) was a very early YouTube user. The settings of his first three videos were a local forest, the cafeteria and the science department of his university campus. Only in late March 2006 did he start to use his bedroom; and he stuck with this setting for the vast majority of videos produced in 2006. Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) joined YouTube in March 2006 and initially used the platform to showcase his Lego stop-motion animation which had constructed settings. Only in June 2006 did he start to shoot subject clips and public diary clips which used his apartment as a setting. Thus setting is an aspect that allows us to gain insights about the evolution and conventionalization of video blogging in general. Inspired by pioneer vloggers like those of BROOKERS, SMOSH, and BOWIECHICK who were recording themselves in a domestic setting (and also 'inspired' by the attention they were getting on the platform and beyond), many people joined YouTube in spring and early summer 2006 and released videos that used a domestic setting (e.g. GAYGOD and RENETTO). Nevertheless, early YouTube users who did not initially use a domestic setting also discovered this option. Thus spring and early summer 2006 can be considered as a period of growth and conventionalization of video blogging.

At the same time it became clear that such conventions also called for variation and novelty as can be seen in the redecoration videos released on BOWIECHICK and LONELYGIRL15 in July – and the expansive outward movement to find other settings.

3.1 From the Bedroom to LA: Video Blogging's Settings

Assumptions about vloggers' increasing creative ambitions and about their own and their viewers' needs for variety underlie this chapter's analysis of settings in terms of an expansive movement. There is another dimension that was, to some extent, working against this movement: Like other techniques, setting could function to create video-to-video continuity in terms of content and form. A setting could become an element of the style and 'brand' of a vlogger. As such it was asking to appear again and again. A succession of SMOSH music videos for theme music from children's television shows and video games can be used to illustrate the negotiation of these different dimensions. There is no indication that Hecox and Padilla planned these videos all at once: Tapping into viewers' childhood nostalgia probably proved successful and prompted them to start further similar video projects with similar objects. In *Power Rangers Theme*, *Mortal Kombat Theme* and *Pokemon Theme Song* the vloggers playfully put Anthony's bedroom into the scene. In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* and *Transformers Theme* the vloggers gradually disposed of Anthony's room as a setting. While the title of *Turtles Theme* promises another nostalgic music video set in Anthony's bedroom, the video itself begins with a narrative non-music-video segment in which the vloggers play frisbee in a forest (see Figs. 5.2.20-29). Once a miraculous sewage pipe brings them back to Anthony's room, a second segment – the 'actual' music video starts (Figs. 5.2.50-52). Nevertheless, in the second segment, settings other than Anthony's room can also be seen (Figs. 5.2.46-49). For *Transformers Theme* they did not use the bedroom setting anymore. Looking at the five videos in sequence enables us to see the narrative segment and the pipe as a playful engagement with viewers' expectations. SMOSH negotiated the success of a specific formula and their own creative ambitions in *Turtles Theme*. Notably, the use of audiovisual techniques and the small and large-scale form of the videos became more complex from video to video (see 5.2 Editing, p. 245).

Vloggers' use of settings is a far more complex issue than it may appear on a first encounter with their videos. Convenience, scarcity, creative ambitions (video projects, changing and consolidating interests), viewer expectations (both of continuity and variety), and emerging conventions intersected in this dimension of the audiovisual practice video blogging.

3.2 Alive and Kicking: The Body in Video Blogging



3.2.1-2 A snippet from BROOKERS' *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*, quoted and subtitled in LONELYGIRL15's *YouTubers Secret Language*.

The LONELYGIRL15 video *YouTubers Secret Language* consists of image snippets from various regular video blogs, among others from BROOKERS, THEWINEKONE, BOWIECHICK and MORBECK, which are accompanied by Extreme's "More Than Words" on the sound track. These snippets show vloggers making exuberant movements with their hands, lips, heads, or with their whole bodies, some of which are amplified by the use of hats and props. A title card at the beginning of the video asks: "Do YouTubers have a secret language?" Subtitles provide guesses as to what the meaning of, for example, Brooke's excessive nodding and waving of her arms (Figs. 3.2.1-2), and Tony Huynh's rapidly 'chopping' hands might be (Fig. 3.2.6-7). The narrator does not seem to be entirely convinced by her own readings – the BROOKERS snippet merely receives "?????????" – and she eventually hands the question over to viewers: "What do you think?" Significantly, the video was released before the first appearance of the fictional vlogger character Bree on the channel. It indicates how attentively the producers of LONELYGIRL15 were watching regular video blogs to prepare the first appearance of Jessica Rose as Bree, and, more importantly, how they stumbled over the curious function of the human body in video blogging which obviously could not entirely be explained in terms of enacting, expressing, and communicating the vlogger's thoughts, feelings, or states of mind.

3.2 Alive and Kicking: The Body in Video Blogging

While the importance of the human body in YouTube video culture is acknowledged in the research, a comprehensive view at the function of the body is missing. The body is typically regarded as a tool of enactment. Within this perspective, self-enactments of emphatic or reflexive and playful kinds are a strong interest (e.g. Peters and Seier 200; Reichert 7-8; Strangelove 69, 79-81). Michael Strangelove asserts that “YouTubers feel” that their videos bring them “closer to each other’s experiences,” but on the other hand “that their online diaries do change them,” that there is “multiple selfhood” in their own and in other people’s videos. Thus on YouTube “[t]he self is both represented in the diary form and constructed through it” (79, 81, 82, 69). The other major interest are unacknowledged fictional performances: None of the major YouTube studies fails to mention LONELYGIRL15, and there are several texts that discuss the project in detail (e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 29; Christian; Kuhn, “YouTube als Loopingbahn” 119).

In this chapter I am taking one step back from the issue of the different kinds of enactments executed through the body in order to conceptualize the functioning of the body in a broader and more comprehensive manner. I suggest that the human body was fulfilling four different functions in video blogging: action, enactment, the creation of audiovisual variety, and its own exploration. The body fulfilled these functions to varying degrees at the same time. The voice and other corporeal operations contributed to the fulfillment of each of these functions. Makeup, props, and costume – what James Naremore refers to as the “accessories” of performance (83) – supported the body. On unacknowledged fictional vlogs, this multiple functioning of the body was emulated and became part of the fictional vlog within the unacknowledged frame.

Action

Showing people carrying out actions has been one of the main interests of audiovisual artifacts since the early days of cinema and comprises both documentary and fictional forms. Ethnographic documentaries like Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922) showed people hunting and building abodes. Noël Carroll makes sense of Buster Keaton’s acting as “action,” as a “series of doings,” and thus points to the importance of ‘mere’ action in fiction film (198). With the introduction of sound, human speech could be reproduced and became one of the prime actions represented on film. Especially in public diary and sub-

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ject clips, speaking is one of the prime things vloggers do, one of the prime types of action. The whole body as an instrument of action is more prominent in self/world documentaries and sketch comedy clips.

The body in action can be a tool of representation, the creation of meaning, and narrative development, but this must not necessarily be so: In *practice carillon keyboard* the songs Amiee Jacobsen (THAUMATA) plays do not matter as much as the mere fact and activity of playing such an uncommon instrument, which we witness in image and sound; Jacobsen in fact only plays fragments of songs (Fig. 3.2.3). When Morbeck and his niece are painting each other's bodies, some of what we see is simply the application of the paint with their fingers (Fig. 3.2.4).



3.2.3-4 *practice carillon keyboard*: Amiee Jacobsen plays an uncommon instrument. *Fun With My Niece*: Morbeck applies finger paint.

The relative importance of ordinary and extraordinary action in YouTube videos is discussed in the YouTube research: “[C]ontrary to the emphases of the mainstream media,” Burgess and Green found “a surprisingly small number of amateur, mundane, ‘slice of life’ videos” in their sample of videos that were popular in late 2007 (43). Landry and Guzdial suggest that the majority of popular YouTube “content showcases everyday people engaging in uncommon activities” (1).

My analysis of successful video blogs of 2005 and 2006 seems to confirm the importance of uncommon, extravagant, and extraordinary ‘doings’ in YouTube’s popular culture. Jacobsen’s carillon playing would be one example. Showing such actions is also given as advice to create interesting videos. In *3:00 AM Madness* Tony Huynh advises:

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“Do something innovative, something unique, that someone has never done on a webcam and then show it to the world.” One of the examples he provides as an illustration is taking a “shower [...] in your room” (Fig. 3.2.5).

While an extraordinary action may be the main attraction of a video, merely functional actions of speaking and doing were executed by vloggers all the time and also part of the body’s functioning in the practice. Actions related to the production of a video also belong into this realm, like turning the camera on and off and repositioning it (Fig. 3.2.6). Irrespective of the question of whether the events related in a public diary clip or the topic discussed in a subject clip is ordinary or extravagant, the act of speaking itself seems to be ordinary or functional in these kinds of videos.



3.2.5 Tony Huynh takes a “shower” in his room (THEWINEKONE, 3:00 AM Madness).

Enactment

Vloggers used their bodies to enact themselves and to enact figures not designated as selves but as ‘others’ (e.g. as fictional characters). This function of the body will be the focus of chapters 4.1. and 4.2. Like action, enactment was executed through speech and other corporeal operations.

Creation of audiovisual variety

The video player which displayed the audiovisual material on a video page was small during the time of interest and beyond. Moreover, it was competing with many other elements craving for attention: The header section held a link to YouTube's homepage, a search field which promised to lead to all sorts of videos a viewer might wish for, and the menu points "Videos," "Channels," "Groups," and "Categories." Lists of thumbnailed videos to the right drew viewers away from the currently playing video to others (Fig. 1.2.2). If the domestic locale of the television set already offered more distractions than the darkness of the cinema, distraction from the 'actual' audiovisual material was multiplied by the YouTube interface. Because of these constraints, the creation of attractive audiovisual material – on the levels of image and sound – was particularly important in early YouTube video culture.

Especially the creation of visual variety was a challenge. Visual variety can be understood in purely graphical terms: as changes of "light and dark," color, "line and shape, volumes and depths, stasis and movement" (Bordwell and Thompson 297). The options for camera movement – one of the key devices for the creation of visual variety in film and television production – were limited for vloggers working on their own if they wanted to become a part of the same image (see 5.1 Cinematography, p. 215). A moving image is expected to move – not to be static; and the moving image in videos on vlogs was in danger of becoming static. Vloggers resorted to the most economic way of creating visual variety, which was moving their bodies, their very mobile hands in particular. I suggest that the creation of visual variety is a candidate for making sense of the use of the body in the videos which are quoted in LONELYGIRL15's *YouTubers Secret Language*.

In *Internet Recognition* Tony Huynh speaks about the "weirdness" of receiving attention from girls for his videos – an experience he is not used to from "real life." He rapidly moves his hands up and down and reflects: "Yes, apparently that's my actions for weirdness" (Fig. 2.1.6). Yet the producers of LONELYGIRL15 were not convinced and provided a different guess about the 'meaning' of the movement (Figs. 3.2.6-7), which, however, did not make sense in the context of *Internet Recognition*. The gesture which to some extent was meant to enact and express a state of mind also created a lot of movement in an otherwise uniform mise-en-scene which seems to be an important function fulfilled at the same time as the function of self-enactment. In his pre-

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vious *3:00 AM Madness* the vlogger had complained about people who “talk to the camera with dead eyes and a dead face” and suggested: “Use expressions! Use hand gestures! Loud voices! Expressive Eyes!” Audiovisual variety seems to be the surplus value and additional function of these ‘expressive’ tactics – irrespective of how aware Huynh was of this function in the specific case of *Internet Recognition*.

Of course such a use of the body, especially of the hands, was not new if we take other audiovisual practices into view: The incessant waving of performers in historical home movies was less of a communicative device than a device for the creation and presentation of movement itself (Schneider 163). Physical exercises like leapfrog generated a lot of profilmic movement through the use of the whole body (Schneider 140). Excessive body movement, for example in home dance videos, works in a similar way in videos on vlogs.



3.2.6-7 A THEWINEKONE snippet: quoted and subtitled in LONELYGIRL15's *YouTubers Secret Language*.

Makeup, costume, and props were supportive to the use of the body to create visual variety. When Pedro Morbeck and his niece are painting each other's bodies in *Fun With My Niece*, they are of course creating variety of color with and on their bodies (Fig. 3.2.4). Brodack's wide-brimmed hat and its hatband amplify the movement of her head in the lip sync music video *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*, another video quoted in *YouTubers Secret Language* (Figs. 3.2.1-2). In a music video for Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas" Brodack is wearing reindeer's antlers which fulfill a similar function; and their bright red creates variety of color (Fig. 3.2.8). Like body movement, such accessories were economical means for the creation of

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visual variety: Brooke's hat and antlers were probably lying around in the house somewhere, and she merely had to put them on. These means contributed to the overall aesthetics of scarcity which characterizes vloggers' videos.



3.2.8 Brodack, dressed up in colorful Christmas fashion, in *All I want for christmas*.

Interestingly, the introduction of such attractive elements was not only quoted on LONELYGIRL15 in mashup videos but also used for the creation of live action videos: In *Purple Monkey* Bree says that her first appearance was “kind of drab” so she is wearing her “fabulous boa” now. The pink boa amplifies her body movement and its color forms a contrast with the purple monkey puppet that is introduced in the same video (Figs. 3.2.9-10). Of course most of the constraints of regular video blogs – such as the distractions offered by other elements of the YouTube interface – also applied to fictional video blogs. It is particularly noteworthy that the producers of LONELYGIRL15 appropriated video bloggers’ recognition of the fact that they needed to do something about these constraints *and* their tactics of coping: excessive body movement and the introduction of fancy accessories found in the vicinity.

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3.2.9-10 The introduction of a feather boa and a monkey puppet on LONELYGIRL15.

Variety of sound could be created by use of the voice and other parts of the body. The function of using “loud voices,” as suggested by Tony Huynh in *3:00 AM Madness*, seems to be largely to create sound variety. In *Renetto goes TANNING* Paul Robinett makes “fart noises” by rubbing his back against the tanning bed (Fig. 3.3.10).

Sound effects that vloggers applied to their voices fulfilled several functions. Pedro Morbeck used a pitch shifting sound effect to enact fictional characters. Melody Oliveria used a fast motion effect that also increased the pitch of her voice to decrease the duration of a section of the footage for *First Videoblog*. In all of these cases the pitch shifting also created variety of sound. In Morbeck’s *The Cat fight* three differently pitched voices can be heard: the high ‘helium’ voice of Chipmunk Chick, the low voice of Alicia, and the unprocessed voice of Morbeck as Morbeck. That the function of pitch shifting extended beyond enactment can probably best be seen in the BROOKERS video *Im special* where pitch shifting and fast motion were applied to an extent that none of the words the vlogger says can be understood anymore. Like the body in general then, speech was more than a device for enactment.

Exploring unruly bodies

Building on Judith Butler’s concept of gender identity as performance – as a “stylized repetition of acts” (270) – Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier make sense of home dancing in YouTube videos as a “playful practice” that “generates and multiplies self-referentialities” (200-201).

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It would be possible to create a similar argument about video blogging in general, an argument about identity constitution through “body practices” (188). Indeed, self-constitution was an important dimension of the use of the body as I am going to illustrate in chapter 4.1. Nevertheless by limiting the functioning of the body to this particular function – however playful or transgressive it may be – the complexity of its work would fall out of sight. The excessive body movement of many vloggers, of those of BROOKERS, THEWINEKONE, and GAYGOD in particular, was to some extent ‘mere’ body movement in front of a camera. The very being of the body in front of the camera and microphone should not be assimilated to identity constitution.

In *Body Shots* Jonathan Auerbach challenges Tom Gunning’s focus on attractions when conceptualizing early cinema and makes sense of early cinema as a cultural practice with a prime interest in the “mobile human figure” instead (12). Early films present “the lived and living body,” a body that “refuses to stand still,” with “changing emotions and emotional affects, which the movie camera, by virtue of its capacity to register motion over time (unlike the still camera), is particularly well equipped to document” (5). Auerbach is very much in line with Bela Balázs who in 1924 argued that cinema was about to bring forth again the human being in the arts: “Der Mensch wird wieder sichtbar werden” (17).

Vloggers used their bodies to execute ordinary and extraordinary actions. They enacted selves and others. They generated varieties of image and sound with their bodies; and thus created, of course, “attractions” in Gunning’s sense.⁴⁹ In order to make sense of the basic fact of corporeal being and activity in front of the camera, I suggest that vloggers also explored their unruly bodies in their videos. Their restless bodies, then, are symptoms of life witnessed by the camera in

⁴⁹ The relationship of YouTube video culture and early cinema understood as a cinema of attractions has been explored by, among others, Joost Broeren (154). Nevertheless, apart from pointing out a few obvious analogies, the explanatory value of the comparison is in doubt. As Tiago Baptista argues, the comparison is in danger of reiterating “the troublesome opposition of narrative and spectacle” at the heart of Gunning’s theory. It also needs to be stressed that videos on vlogs are audiovisual and not ‘only’ visual artifacts, which makes the comparison with early cinema and Gunning’s doubtlessly visual notion of attraction appear less suggestive than the first glance suggested.

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Auerbach's and Balász's sense. This is the fourth dimension of the body's functioning that concludes this chapter.

Tony Huynh's body is an issue and at issue in *Internet Recognition* and *Hand Gestures*. In the former video Huynh responds to compliments like "You're totally cute" from female viewers of his videos: "I think there has been only one girl who has ever said that I was a-a-a-attractive. She was drunk." In the latter he complains that he has "the most annoying voice" and speaks about his fear of growing bald. Attributes of the body itself are at issue here – not so much attributes of the subject. The physicality of his presentation and language are striking: Huynh's proposal for a gesture to threaten someone in *Hand Gestures* is punching one's own face. When he actually punches his face several times, the communicative dimension of the gesture recedes while the mere physicality of the corporeal act can be witnessed: the vlogger actually seems to hurt. We are witnessing the exploration of the vlogger's body during the crucial time when the young man receives, for the first time as it seems, attention from girls.

Unruly adolescent bodies are common in videos on vlogs from 2005 and 2006: bodies in transition – not child anymore, but not adult yet – bodies that felt and looked strange, that were explored and negotiated in front of the camera. Unlike users of a public webcam service, vloggers on YouTube could decide about uploading the footage after the profilmic activities had been captured (see also p. 164). The larger part of the footage of vloggers' corporeal exploration was probably never encountered by real viewers on the platform – even if it was shot with implied viewers in mind. Brodack's body seems to be too tall and slim, and she has a gap between her front teeth. There is randomness and lack of control in her body movement (Fig. 2.1.1). She explored and presented her unruly body and responded to comments, for example about her teeth, in her videos (e.g. *V-Clog 2 instruments*). Melody Oliveria's body was unruly in multiple ways: She was adolescent, chubby, and had hanging eyelids. She presented her body already knowing that it would attract hateful comments; preemptively she addressed such comments in *First Videoblog*.

The body of Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) was unruly not because it was adolescent but because it was old. It was a body that was moving and speaking beyond the context of capitalist productivity. Its positive function with regards to that field had long ceased, but somehow this body was still 'working' even though it had long stopped to work. This economically useless body refused to be still and disappear. On the contrary, Oakley let his creaking but moving body re-appear from

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retirement when he began shooting and releasing videos on YouTube (see Sørenssen).

In YouTube videos and comments, in the “Community Guidelines,” and in the scholarship hateful response to videos is typically made sense of in terms of ostracizing self-identifying groups. *Flagged Or Fagged?* is a video uploaded by the vlogger GRIMACE in 2007 in which he observes that viewers report videos as ‘inappropriate’ because there is “some gay content” in them. The “Community Guidelines” stressed that YouTube does “not permit hate speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, and sexual orientation/gender identity).” Minke Kampman’s contribution to the *Video Vortex Reader* deplores flagging of “LGBT” content on YouTube (153). Sometimes, however, hate speech on YouTube cannot be made sense of in terms of identity. In the cases of Brooke’s teeth, Melody’s chubbiness, and Peter’s age it is just the visible body that is at issue, not an identity.

In the cases of all of these examples it is of course important that vloggers presented their living bodies on their own. The agency of appearing in videos and producing them characterized video blogging. When a journalist asked Jean-Luc Godard about “new media and technology,” the director responded: “I try to keep up. But people make films on the Internet to show that they exist, not in order to look at things” (qtd. in Lovink, “The Art of Watching Databases” 9). Godard seems to be right, but unlike his statement implies, giving an account of one’s existence might be regarded emancipatory use of the new medium YouTube after all.

As the BROOKERS and THEWINEKONE videos which were analyzed in several sections of this chapter indicate, these functions of the body were not mutually exclusive: On the contrary, bodies functioned in different ways at the same time. Video blogging was an audiovisual practice in which corporeal delivery was very important: the multiple functioning of the human body with regards to the coming-into-being of audiovisual artifacts.

3.3 ADHD or Multitasking? Video Bloggers' Attention

Anything good on TV lately? Why am I asking you? You're a fuckin' camera. (BOH3M3, *Ahhhhhh Dating*)

YouTube is frequently regarded as a social medium on which users are interacting with each other via videos and comments. The prominence of “direct address” in YouTube videos is given as evidence for this reading (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54) – even though television news were never very interactive in spite of the use of direct address. This chapter proposes to see ‘interaction with other users’ in the context of a wider field of interactivity. The starting point is vloggers’ attention to themselves, the setting, co-performers, the camera, implied viewers, and other entities while being on camera. Indications of vloggers’ attention can be gained from what they say and do (for example, where their gaze is directed). This analysis is part of the wider endeavor of describing and making sense of vloggers’ activities in profilmic space. Building on the study of the production process (chapter 2.4), I am suggesting that successful YouTube video production was a challenge in the early days of the platform – in spite of the nominal freedom it provided.

I borrow the idea of attention as an important element of a performance from Stanislavski’s *An Actor Prepares* (79–102). This analysis will take the reverse direction of his: Whereas Stanislavski trained actors to “concentrate” their attention – a phenomenon he regarded as automatic to our everyday activities but necessary to be technically recreated for his ideal of a realist theater (84) – this chapter will study attention in audiovisual representations of profilmic presentations. What we tend to encounter in video blogs is not concentration of attention but shifts of attention and simultaneous attention to different entities. But then, such was the very behavior Stanislavski observed during the performance of his actors and that he wanted to counter. These similarities make his observations and terms useful for the analysis presented here. Stanislavski regarded attention and interaction as interdependent activities: “Intensive observation of an object naturally arouses a desire to do something with it. To do something with it in turn intensifies your observation of it” (83). Thus attention ultimately leads to address and interaction, for example to address of and interaction with a co-performer or implied viewers. What I do not

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share with Stanislavski is his opposition to multiple attention and shifts of attention (98). The different purposes of creating realist theater performances and making sense of the audiovisual practice video blogging need to be called to mind here.



3.3.1 “I need my medication!” The fictional vlogger character Fred in *Fred Loses His Meds*.

A context of this analysis is the apparent relationship between the YouTube experience and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Geert Lovink suggests: “When we sit down at the computer, we all get ADHD” (Lovink, “The Art of Watching Databases” 10). With regards to production rather than viewing, ADHD was presented as a principle condition of video blogging on the channel FRED – a channel started in 2007 that headed the most-subscribed ranking for several years – with the fictional character of a boy who was a self-identifying case of the disorder (Fig. 3.3.1). This leads to the question: Were video bloggers cases of ADHD or was their shared and shifting attention and hyperactivity merely a response to the scarcities of personnel and time that were conditions of video production?

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In videos on vlogs there is attention to the following entities:

- the vloggers themselves (both as bodies and subjects),
- settings, props, and co-performers,
- video projects and objects,
- the production process,
- the camera,
- the recorded image (that is displayed on a control screen during the profilmic presentation),
- software effects,
- intertexts,
- conventions of video blogging and of other practices,
- implied viewers.

With a couple of case studies of videos from the core corpus, I want to illustrate and make sense of attention to these different entities with a particular focus on shifts of attention and simultaneous attention.

In the first shot of *The Delaware Boy* Tony Huynh addresses **implied viewers**: “Hello, how is it going? This is Tony Huynh from THEWINEKONE.” Not only his speech, also his eyes address viewers via the handheld camera, while he is walking through a small forested area (Fig. 3.3.2). Already during the introduction, however, he averts his gaze and gives an insecure smile.⁵⁰ He speaks hesitantly and with many ‘uhs’ (Fig. 3.3.3). Apart from the conscious self presentation that is a central mode of performance on video blogs (chapter 4.1), there are moments when vloggers’ attention unintentionally falls back onto **themselves**, on their very bodies and on themselves as subjects. Huynh’s strategy for coping with his insecurity is to direct his own attention and that of viewers at the **video object** which seems to be the “creepy” forest near his home: “Everyday I walk down this path and I wonder: ‘Why is it so creepy’? The **video project** seems to be to document himself in the creepy forest. He pans away from his own face at a group of kid chairs and a bathroom rack which are surrounding a fire pit, and which constitute the video’s main **setting** (Figs. 3.3.2-4). These objects have obviously been compiled by playing children, but tongue-in-cheek Huynh wonders if this is the site of

⁵⁰ See Richard Dyer for an analysis of the averted gaze in advertisements and other visual texts (“Don’t Look Now” 63)

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supernatural activities and concludes: “My backyard is haunted.” He positions himself in an improvised fire pit and tries to “summon up ghosts” by chanting “Bloody Mary.” Showing the vlogger in interaction with his environment, the video would be an example of a self/world documentary – or mockumentary rather (see 2.3 Kinds of Videos).



3.3.2-4 Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) in *The Delaware Boy*.

Huynh handholds the camera throughout and also struggles with a technical flaw: The camera stops recording 30 seconds into a take. Eventually, he gets frustrated, aborts shooting further footage, and leaves the forest. Obviously, the **camera** is an object of attention and interaction by itself that is ontologically different from the implied viewers it stands in for. The brief epigraph at the beginning of this chapter seems to epitomize the distinction: “Anything good on TV lately? Why am I asking you? You’re a fuckin’ camera.” In photography for advertising and in newscasts on television performers “substitute” the camera for “an imaginary [...] onlooker” (Messaris 41). While attention is on

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an implied viewer, another person is attending to the camera. The distinction is particularly relevant in video blogging because vloggers are performers and camera operators at the same time: As performers they address implied viewers that virtually substitute the recording device; as camera operators they have to pay attention to the camera as a material object and a recording tool. At the beginning of a few videos we see the hands of vloggers move away from the camera after turning it on and at the end towards it to turn it off (see Fig. 2.4.2). Attention to the camera is part of vloggers' overall attention to the **production process** of the video during shooting.

Taking into account the link of a New-England-looking forest in the fall season, found objects, and supernatural activities, *The Blair Witch Project* comes to mind as an intertext of the video. The famous 1999 mockumentary was set in Maryland, which makes the vlogger's use of another New England state in the video title stand out as a further reference, because he is located in Canada really. Bloody Mary is a folk legend according to which a ghost can be summoned up by chanting Bloody Mary three times. Accordingly it seems that the vlogger's attention is also on **intertexts** and thus on the cultural context he is situated in and of which the video will become a part once uploaded. Such an attention is particularly prominent, of course, in parodic performance videos and music videos.

In *The Delaware Boy* we encounter a first-time videomaker is very much under stress because he has to attend to various points of attention and to fulfill multiple tasks, also because of the limits of the equipment which make him abort shooting further footage. In the "Special Director's Commentary" in the second half of the video he reflects on these challenges. Already in his second video *Oh Hungry Oh Man!* he is a lot more relaxed. He has also organized his profilmic presentation into bits of a duration that his camera could record in one take. Editing and titling, postproduction that is, became important techniques in Huynh's videos. He also did not produce many self/world documentaries anymore but public diary and subject clips which had a domestic setting where things were a lot more under control during production.

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Renetto goes TANNING is a self/world documentary which is a master piece in terms of attending to multiple entities, fulfilling of tasks, and reflection of the shooting stage during the shooting stage itself. The video documents Robinett's first-time visit to a tanning studio to treat oral herpes. The vlogger uses the built-in camera of a MacBook to record the footage⁵¹ – a challenge because unlike a 'proper' camera, a laptop does not have a grip. Robinett affirms the simultaneous fulfillment of performer and videomaker functions by handholding most of the shots.



3.3.5-6 Establishing shot that continues inside the studio.



3.3.7 The vlogger shows his "cold sore" to implied viewers – and probably also monitors his own image on the computer screen.

⁵¹ In one shot the laptop is 'folded' to a degree that the camera records part of the device itself which makes identification of the model possible (Fig. 3.3.12).

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The video starts with a kind of establishing shot that shows the vlogger in front of the studio and introduces the setting (Fig. 3.3.5). Interestingly, the vlogger defers telling implied viewers the reason for his visit when he is outside, probably because he wants to tell it to the tanning studio's staff anyways: "Okay, I'm here at Extreme Tan in Canal Winchester, and I'll explain why I'm tanning here in a second." The shot continues with the vlogger entering the studio. After introducing himself to the assistant (Fig. 3.3.6) his viewers indirectly receive the information about the reason for the visit when he says: "I have this big cold sore on my lip, and it's really nasty. [...] I was told that if I went tanning there was a possibility that that would help dry that up" (Fig. 3.3.7). Robinett avoids redundancy already during the shooting stage – not only when editing the footage – by giving the reason for the visit only once. Starting with an establishing shot and deferring to provide the reason for the visit indicate how the vlogger is performing and shooting with the overall video project in mind.

Unlike Huynh in *The Delaware Boy*, Robinett has a **co-performer** to attend to. He pans between himself and the assistant during their initial conversation in the front room and while she leads him to the room with the tanning bed. In terms of visual variety, this clip has a lot more to offer than the typical public diary or subject clip since it offers an unusual setting, two performers, and – because of the profilmic interaction with the partner – varied views of the vlogger's head (Figs. 3.3.6-7).

Most of the details of the profilmic events were apparently decided on during the shooting stage itself. It seems that the two of them did not meet before. The assistant is surprised when Robinett enters with the laptop, and she does not seem to know what YouTube is: When told to say "Hi YouTube," she says "Hi you too." Unforeseen 'information' is affirmed and integrated into the video. When the vlogger notices the "tiki hut" decorations on their way to the tanning room, for example, he compliments on them and directs the camera at them. He makes some theatrical fuss when the assistant tells him that he has to completely undress:

"When I go in there and tan... I mean: How does that normally work?"

"You have a delay mode. You have four minutes to undress – and we mean undress. You don't wanna see... Your wife don't wanna see any tan lines."

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“Ohh... Wait a minute. Is this all private an all?”

“Very private.”

“Except for my... Except for my video camera!”

“Yes.”

The problem posed here is of course a problem of cinematography and thus of the production process: How to show the tanning without appearing naked on camera? When she has turned on the “delay mode” and left him to undress and tan, he communicates his decision-making: “I gotta somehow position my laptop so you can... well, we can go tanning together” (Fig 3.3.9). He also wonders what to talk about during the lengthy procedure. In the shots of the actual tanning, the laptop is sitting on a chair next to the tanning bed (Figs. 3.3.10-11) or handheld, ‘sandwiched’ between Robinett’s chest and the top cover of the bed (Figs. 3.3.12). Making “fart noises” by rubbing his body against the tanning bed (Fig. 3.3.10), wondering if he is “gonna go blind” when his goggles fall off (Fig. 3.3.11), and a reference to Michael Jackson’s “hyperbaric chamber” are bits of ‘content’ that he comes up while tanning. Apart from that, most of the footage of the tanning was discarded in postproduction.

Unlike in the cases of Morbeck’s *The Cat fight* and *YouTube Don’ts* for which an integrated preparation of the shooting and postproduction stages was important and part of the creative achievement (see p. 91), spontaneity and juggling tasks were crucial when shooting *Renetto goes TANNING*. There were various constrictions for the vlogger when shooting this self/world documentary. He had multiple points of attention and multiple tasks to fulfill. Robinett showed his viewers the challenge and the coping. These reflexive elements became parts of the video itself. Anna Everett (8) and Geert Lovink (12) argue that multitasking is an essential part of media consumption. I suggest that in the case of video blogging this was also the case for production – and that this multitasking was a response to the scarcities of personnel and time.

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3.3.8-9 The tanning room. After the assistant has left, Robinett wonders how to record the tanning procedure.



3.3.10-11 Static shots, probably from a chair.



3.3.12 A handheld shot, the computer lying on the vlogger's chest.

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Another important albeit complex point of attention during vloggers' profilmic presentation was the **recorded image** that was shown on the display of a camcorder or on a computer screen while recording. One of the functions of the look at the recorded image was to check its quality, for example to adjust framing. Robinett probably checked the results in the *TANNING* video at the same time as he addressed implied viewers (see Fig. 3.3.7). Real viewers of YouTube videos become aware of such glances only if the lens and the screen displaying the image are not close together. In *first try* Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) is staring about 20° off with reference to the lens. While he is addressing viewers in his speech, he is obviously looking at the recorded image on the computer screen. Looking at the camera and not staring at the recorded image seems to be a convention that inexperienced vloggers like Peter had to learn: "Look at the damn camera" is part of the advice Nate Burr gives in *How to make better videos*. A constant stare off like in *first try*, however, is uncommon in the corpus. Those vloggers that turned out to be successful were apparently able to integrate attention to implied viewers, to themselves, and to the camera (that is, after all, controlled via attention to the recorded image) via imperceptible or disguised looks at the recorded image.

The recorded image is, of course, largely an image of the vlogger herself/himself. Indeed, this particular gaze seems to support Geert Lovink's reading of YouTube as a "mirror;" for Lovink, YouTube is not so much about "Broadcast Yourself" but "mainly about 'Broadcasting to Yourself'" (11). We also need to call to mind Rosalind Krauss's – now classical – reading of such a precise gaze as a symptom of "narcissism" being "endemic to works of video art" (50). Looking at actual YouTube videos, however, suggests that this gaze is fulfilling multiple functions at the same time – not only a single, for example a narcissist, function. In *I want to make a VIDEO... because I want to be a STAR!* Robinett and two of his children are using the screen displaying the recorded image – on a MacBook only slightly below the lens – as if it were a mirror (Figs. 3.3.13-16). They make faces, which seems to be a pretty self-referential activity. However, their faces are not only dedicated to themselves but also to each other: They in fact react to each other's funny faces (Fig. 3.3.14). The quarrel about the children's plan to make a video on their own and becoming famous is in part conducted via 'mirror' images. The camera and the recorded image on the control screen, then, are functioning as a communicative device which shares profilmic space with the participants. Robinett himself addresses implied viewers (without notably changing the direction of his

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gaze) when he shakes his head over his children's claims to stardom (Fig. 3.3.13). When he directly addresses his son on his left, his daughter has her own little joke with the 'mirror' and the implied viewers (Figs. 3.3.15-16). The three of them are also constantly adjusting framing and thus controlling the quality of the recorded image. It also should be added that in this particular video the narcissist gaze is productively interacting with the topic of the video: the children's vanity and aspirations to stardom.



3.3.13-16 *I want to make a VIDEO... because I want to be a STAR!*
(RENETTO).

An uncommon but interesting phenomenon is the manipulation of the recorded image through **software effects** during the shooting stage. In *Breakup* Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) is 'wearing' different kinds of glasses, a gas mask, and a diving mask (Figs. 2.1.8). She uses a software effect that tracks the movements of her face and superimposes cartoon mattes onto it. While she is talking about the

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end of a relationship, she switches between mattes using a mouse or a keyboard. She also looks at the results as they are displayed on the computer screen, which can be inferred from her laughter after some of the switches. Her attention seems to be shifting between implied viewers, the breakup she has to recount (the video's object), the computer's interface that controls camera and software effects, and the processed image. The use of software effects during shooting – switching between effects in particular – confounds the usual association of visual and sound effects with postproduction. In the production of these videos, elements of postproduction were integrated into the shooting stage. Vloggers responded to the scarcity that was a condition of YouTube videomaking by including different steps into the shooting stage. These videos display a heightened sense of performativity. Video bloggers are performing postproduction, if you will.

Conventions of other practices and conventions of video blogging are also points of attention. In *Brookers News* the vlogger imitates the posture and mode of speaking of news presenters. Video blogging itself became a point of reference when the practice consolidated. In her first YouTube video, which was uploaded at the end of May 2006, the vlogger of PAYTOTHEORDEROFOFOF2 says she has been watching video blogs on YouTube for a while and decided to make her own. Her presentation shows an awareness of the evolving conventions of video blogging discussed in this study (*Blog 1*).

Typically, the entities of attention and interaction described here can also be found in the fictional shooting stage within the unacknowledged framing situation of production of unacknowledged fictional vlogs. In LITTLELOCA's *Sammy comes out of the closet, but not all the way*, the experienced fictional vlogger character Cynthia is ill and lying on a bed in the background while her inexperienced friend Sammy is "doing the blogging." Sammy turns the camera on and keeps wondering "Is it on?" staring at the camera as a mere recording tool, while footage is already being created which real viewers are going to see on YouTube (Fig. 3.3.17). Implied viewers become an object of his attention only 15 seconds into the video after Cynthia has assured him that the camera is on. He introduces himself and the video's topic: finally coming out as a gay man (Fig. 3.3.18). At the end of this one-shot clip he also 'struggles' to turn the camera off. Instead of playing to their actual abilities, Stevie Ryan and her co-performer exaggerate and condense traits of regular video blogs run by inexperienced vloggers in this video. Viewers are invited to enjoy the inexperience of Sammy, his struggles with the demands of attending to the camera, his friend,

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implied viewers, and himself. A specific (voyeuristic) pleasure is watching Sammy while he is not sure if the camera is on.



3.3.17-19 Sammy wonders if the camera “is on” before addressing implied viewers and Cynthia (LITTLELOCA, *Sammy comes out of the closet, but not all the way*).

Taking a look at address of **implied viewers** in videos, we encounter both address of unspecified viewers and of individual viewers. The latter are other YouTube users and, in a few cases, people a vlogger knows from real life. In *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube* Nate Burr addresses the vloggers of MORBECK and THEWINEKONE to praise their work. Robinett addresses his wife – who is lying in bed in the next room – in *A “Secret Love Song” to my sick Wife....* In each of these videos the vlogger also addresses a general YouTube viewership. Address of individual viewers resituates the general viewership as onlookers of a smaller address. Of course nothing about these videos

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is private: Vloggers are staging a personal interaction within for a public presentation.

In the context of Burgess and Green's view of "webcam culture" as a precursor of video blogging (*YouTube* 53) it is important to call fundamental differences between webcam services and YouTube back to mind. YouTube was not a service via which people could 'broadcast' themselves to viewers. YouTube users could not stream an audiovisual signal to their channels like they might have done with a webcam. Both the use of "Broadcast" and of "Channel" in YouTube's interface (Figs. 1.2.2 and 1.2.5) were misleading in this regard. YouTube only enabled users to upload discrete audiovisual objects in the form of video files (see chapter 1.2). Users could skip individual stages of production but a gap between production and distribution/exhibition was constitutive of the mediality of YouTube and of all the practices it could host. This is why a distinction between "implied" and "real" viewers is important to understand viewer address and interaction in YouTube videos: The former are constructed by the audiovisual artifact itself, the latter have a "flesh-and-blood" existence in the real world (Chatman 149-150). Even if we suspended our disbelief and accounted for near real-time mediated communication as 'direct' communication with a real viewers, we would have to concede that this was not how YouTube worked and works: YouTube users could not 'directly' address viewers; they could only address a camera and implied viewers. Uploading always only happened *after* shooting (and postproduction). Unlike in the case of a webcam, there was always the option to review the footage before anyone would see it.

Burgess and Green also stress the "conversational character" of video blogging:

The vlog reminds us of the residual character of interpersonal face-to-face communication and provides an important point of difference between online video and television. [...] [D]irect address to the viewer inherently invites feedback. [...] Direct response, through comment and via video, is central to this mode of engagement. (54)

However, YouTube was no camera phone service like Skype either. Such services may remind us of "face-to-face communication" indeed, but YouTube is only inadequately described in this way: No vlogger

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ever saw her/his viewers face-to-face via the service. Melody Oliveria saw her camera, computer, and a processed camera image of herself when shooting *Breakup*. Not only direct address also direct response were impossible. Once a video was uploaded it was not even clear if anyone would watch it or who this would be. Uploading a video to YouTube was and is essentially a singular act of adding a video to the offerings of the platform with unspecific implied viewers in mind. There could be real viewers at some point but there was no guarantee. Viewer address in YouTube videos has much more in common with 'direct address' in non-live television production than with live television broadcasts, webcam services, or Internet phone services.

Interestingly, we encounter both address of the general viewership and of individual viewers not in spontaneous or sincere but in formalized fashions. The general viewership is addressed with performer-specific phrases like Nate Burr's "Hello again" and Peter Oakley's "Hello You-Tubers." A function of these standardized modes of address was to brand performer and channel (see also p. 171). Address of individuals frequently takes the conventionalized structure of shout-outs: A couple of vloggers mention the names of other users towards the end of a video. I suggest that attempting to start a communicative exchange was only one dimension of direct address of implied viewers in video blogging (see 7.3 Aiming for Success, pp. 315-322 and 334-338).

Such devices were picked up, affirmed, and in some cases further developed on unacknowledged fictional video blogs. Standardized forms of general address were particularly typical; the producers of EMOKID21OHIO ("Hey, it's me Matt again"), LITTLELOCA ("Hey what up everybody?") and LONELYGIRL15 ("Hey guuuys...") wanted to create coherent and recognizable characters and build a viewer base within YouTube culture after all.

Response from and interaction with a real viewers are issues that come into view in chapter 7.5.

Attention in conclusion

YouTube's "low barriers to entry" in terms of formal training and industry affiliation of users, and of content and form of videos (Burgess and Green, "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 103) may give the impression that producing YouTube videos was an uncomplicated and easy enterprise in the early years of the platform. Already in a previous chapter I sug-

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gested that successfully contributing videos was not that easy because of viewers' growing demands for 'good' videos, and also because vloggers were trying to live up to their own creative ambitions and standards.

Scarcity, especially of personnel, was conditioning YouTube video production. Activating local social networks to 'hire' participants and multitasking were the two basic kinds of response. Morbeck was a multitasker who put tasks normally fulfilled at the same time into sequence in videos like *The Cat fight* and *YouTube Don'ts*. Labor from the shooting stage was transferred to the preparation and postproduction stages in this kind of multitasking (see 2.4 Stages of Production). In this chapter the other type of multitasking – the simultaneous fulfillment of multiple tasks during the shooting stage – has been discussed. Such a time-saving mode of production can be understood as a response to the scarcity not only of personnel but also of time. Vloggers reflected on challenges and made reflection as well as the challenges themselves constitutive elements of their presentation. They responded with tactics of multitasking in quickly shifting their attention between different entities and paying attention to different entities at the same time. While multiple and shared attention and hyperactivity of vloggers on camera could be symptoms of ADHD, I suggest they are better understood as tactics of coping with the conditions of YouTube videomaking. Paul Robinett was a vlogger who excelled in this regard and created diverse and complex videos with few people and little time involved.

The existence of multiple entities of attention suggests that vloggers' profilmic being was neither primarily self-obsessed nor interactive with regards to other users. A rich and complex instead of a simple narcissist or interactive performance can be encountered in videos such as *The Delaware Boy*, *Breakup*, and *Renetto goes TANNING*.

4 Interdependent Modes of Performance

The contemporary “disparate usages” of the term “performance” comprise the “display of skills,” “patterned behaviour” in social space, “the general success” of an “activity in the light of some standard,” and “performance art” (Carlson 3-5). Whereas in film studies the term “acting” is used to refer to the “work of creating a dramatic character by a professional or amateur performer,” the term “performance” is “used to describe both the work of acting and more broadly the role of the body in the cinema,” including non-fiction film (Kuhn and Westwell, “Acting”). Performance also refers to Judith Butler’s constructivist concept of gender (270). Marvin Carlson makes an attempt at linking these uses and at distilling a quality that characterizes performance in general: “Performance is always performance for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self” (5; also qtd. in Schneider 121). This view is also taken here. Like Carlson, and unlike the orthodox view taken in some parts of theater studies (e.g. Umathum 233), performance in the context of this project does not necessitate the actual physical co-presence of performers and recipients, but can also happen for implied recipients.

In the previous chapter I made sense of the functioning of vloggers’ bodies in terms of four different functions. I also approached vloggers’ attention to various entities during shooting in profilmic space. This chapter builds on the previous chapter, for example on the recognition of enactment as one of the functions fulfilled by the body. However, in this chapter the focus will be less on what vloggers do and on the functions of the body in general than on what vloggers present in their videos to implied viewers. The focus will be on their performance. The view taken here is more ‘superficial’ in the sense of looking less at the processes of presentation than on the results. Not only the results of profilmic activities, also of audiovisual techniques like pitch shifting, for example to enact a fictional character, will be relevant to a certain extent.

To conceptualize performance in home movies from the 1930s, Alexandra Schneider uses a model of four modes of performance (138-139) that she adapts from Eggo Müller’s study of dating game shows (*Paarungsspiele* 88-89). I am further adapting Schneider’s

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model to make sense of performance in video blogging and point out qualifications to the terminology in the respective chapters. Performing self, performing an other, the presentation of skills, and the representation of accidents were interdependent modes of performance in video blogging.

Because modes are understood as general categories only, their employment need not lead to a reduction of the complexities of performance in actual videos. The model can also account for switches in one and the same video and for performers operating in different modes at the same time: “Die Performance lässt sich als Sequenz verschiedener Darstellungsregister verstehen. In der Praxis gehen diese oft fließend ineinander über, oder sie werden nebeneinander und parallel angewendet” (Schneider 176-177).⁵² The fourfold model provides the overall frame for my analysis and the structure of this chapter.

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Among the four modes, performing self and performing an other are a complementary couplet. This chapter is going to look at the first of these modes. I understand enactments in which people claim to be presenting themselves – and which are not marked as enactments of other real-world people, fictional characters, types, etc. in the audiovisual material itself or in paratexts on YouTube and beyond (e.g. in news media) – as self performances. Because the question of a scenic or non-scenic enactment is not necessary for my purposes, I drop the “szenische” in my adaptation of Schneider’s “szenische Selbstdarstellung” (138).

Video blogging on YouTube became a news media topic in September 2006 in *The New York Times* (Heffernan and Zeller), the *Los Angeles Times* (Rushfield and Hoffman, “Mystery Fuels Popularity of Web’s Lonelygirl15”), *The Guardian* (Glaister), and on various television networks. However, not a regular video blog, but LONELYGIRL15 was discussed in these pieces. On LONELYGIRL15 a young woman named Bree appeared to be talking about everyday topics, like par-

⁵² “The performance can be seen as a sequence of different registers of (re)presentation. In practice, transitions are often seamless, or registers are layered and parallel” (translation RH).

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ents, friends and school assignments. The news pieces reported that Bree was played by an actress, and that the vlog was the project of three twenty-somethings with disparate backgrounds. Typically, examples of regular video blogs were not mentioned. Nevertheless, negatively, the coverage gave the impression that video blogging was a confessional diarist practice of self performances about everyday topics (e.g. Rushfield and Hoffman; Glaister). I have already shown that video blogging in the early days of YouTube was a practice which produced various kinds of videos among which the public diary clip was but one and that 'everyday' topics and 'ordinary' activities were less prominent than is often claimed. In this chapter and in chapter 4.2, I complicate the impression of a dominance of sincere self performances on regular video blogs.

Emphatic self performances

Self performances on regular video blogs can be roughly divided into emphatic and reflexive self performances. The vlogger of BOWIECHICK swings to the former. In her first public diary clip, Melody Oliveria introduces herself – without her surname – and provides her age and the name of her favorite star: “My name is Melody, I’m seventeen years old, and I’m a big David Bowie fan which you can tell from my screen name” (Fig. 2.1.7). Her presentation is conducted in a sincere manner and she does not contextualize it as a put-on in the video, in paratexts, and neither do sources created by others. She talks about the things that are going on in school and in her private life in most of her videos. *Before school* is a short video recorded in a hurry in which she says her habit of being late will probably result in losing credit for a few classes. *Breakup* deals with the end of a romantic relationship. On BOWIECHICK a young woman seems to be enacting herself and giving an account of herself and her life through video blogging.

Interestingly, the first video in which Pedro Morbeck, who usually enacted other vloggers and fictional characters in his videos (see chapter 4.2), chose to perform as himself also seems to be a case of an emphatic self performance:

This is Morbeck being Morbeck – both for the fans and for the people that hate me. But yes, this is me as how I am. [...] I’m not a cross-dresser. I do it just for the videos because I think it’s funny and I like it [...]. I don’t know, I just thought I make this

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video so you people will get to know me as myself a little more, will get to know me a little more, so you maybe understand the character, that I'm not really like that. You see, this is me now, really how I talk and how I am, right?



4.1.1 MORBECK, *To the fans and haters*.

The self is enacted here in order to demarcate the performance of an other, of the “character” Chipmunk Chick. The view on identity that transpires is not performative; that is, it is not a view of identity “instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” in the first place (Butler 270). Self performance is understood as the embodiment of a given self that should be presented as truthfully as possible.

Several points can be made here. First of all, Morbeck is performing as himself with an agenda: His self performance is motivated rather than spontaneous. The cap and the matching – or at least not clashing – shirt also suggest that he dressed up for the performance of his ‘real’ self (Fig. 4.1.1). He chose a neutral background or neutralized the background for shooting the video; that is, he eliminated the domestic context of production – very much like in his performances of Chipmunk Chick (see 3.1 Settings). Perhaps we get less of a notion of a ‘true’ self that is presented to us than of an ideal self or of an enactment that we are supposed to like: Morbeck obviously likes himself as a sensitive skater boy speaking in a soft voice, or thinks that viewers – including the haters – will like him this way. In spite of the personal tone, he only uses his surname and not his first name Pedro in the video. Most interesting, however, is a concession that he makes after his repetitive insistence of “really” being himself: “Except for what I really am is Brazilian. I talk Portuguese all the time. But I did live in the United States for four years so I speak English as well.” Arguably, the

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harder a person aims at full and authentic self-presence the more this performance will strike the audience as constructed. Authentication does not lead to authenticity but to the necessity of authenticating the tools of authentication – in Morbeck’s case of the English language.

Reiterating all the challenges to the possibility of authentic self presence and presentation from psychoanalysis to poststructuralism only to illustrate how wrong or naïve some vloggers were does not seem ingenious or productive. It seems important to acknowledge that there was a desire, in some instances, of vloggers to speak as themselves in a sincere manner that may have passed as a presentation of a true self to them – and probably also to their viewers (similarly: Strangelove 65, 79).

Reflexive self performances

In the video *Three times a day* Nate Burr of BLUNTY3000 selects the signature greeting “Hello again” to distinguish himself among other vloggers: “Hey kids. Hi guys. No: Hello again.” The greeting can be heard in slight variation at the beginning of most of his future videos. It is accompanied by a specific gesture of the right hand (Fig. 4.1.2). What follows after the signature greeting and move is a further identifying signal: theatrically lighting a cigarette – a provocation of American viewers by the Australian vlogger – that also recurs in future videos.



4.1.2 “Hello again:” Signature greeting on BLUNTY3000 (*Chasing...*).

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Not only the “Hello again” greeting itself but also the choice of the greeting is presented in *Three times a day*. Burr seems to be consciously creating or inventing a persona he refers to as self in the video. Burr is not only reflecting about himself – like Oliveria in *First Videoblog* – but also about his tactics of self enactment and presentation (see Strangelove 74).

In summer 2006 Burr fell in love with the American vlogger of KATZ20TWO. She eventually visited him in Tasmania, and there were plans of permanently moving there. The romance became a news item in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in September in which Burr had a couple of things to say about how he introduced “the topic of romance” on his video blog: “I think I spent about two to three weeks referring to Katz only as a ‘mystery girl.’ To keep people guessing, I dropped a few hints and once we made the decision that she would come to Tasmania, I released a little more information about how I met her.”⁵³ Burr had enacted a grumpy and provocative self in his videos thus far, but at some point, ‘life’, if you will, interfered with the self-image that had been created: “I found myself rather happy. [...] My videos changed when she was down here which annoyed a lot of people. But others were very happy for us and dozens of people have now shared their stories of meeting people over internet [sic] from far way” (qtd. in Hearn). Their decision was thus to be “very careful not to interfere with Nate’s established format and fans” and to release “joint posts [...] under a joint account” only (Hearn). Burr continued to perform as a grumpy man on BLUNTY3000.

While the narration of the romance is probably merely a case of consciously shaping life and self for online representation, a performative notion of documentary becomes prominent in another segment of BLUNTY3000. A series of self/world documentaries deals with the destruction of the Blunt-Top, the vlogger’s heavily customized laptop. Burr had offered destroying the Blunt-Top on camera in order to receive a MacBook. A video that listed the customizations of the Blunt-Top, two videos documenting its incineration, and an obituary followed. In this series, real-life events were performatively created for the purpose of documenting them. In *Sherman’s March*, the diarist filmmaker Ross McElwee says: “I’m filming life in order to have a life to film” (qtd.

⁵³ Like on the unacknowledged fictional vlogs LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST (p. 71) romance was dramatically narrated by providing and withholding and shaping information on BLUNTY3000.

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in Lane 73). A similar procedure can be witnessed in the videos of the Blunt-Top's destruction.

Nevertheless, like BOWIECHICK's emphatic self performances, BLUNTY3000's reflexive performances are still contextualized as presentations of a self and not of an other. Burr does not suggest that it is anything but his own laptop he is destroying in the videos, for example. Still photos from his work of customizing and spray-painting the laptop four years ago emphasize the 'personal' relationship between himself and the computer.

Multiple selves

Especially on channels on which reflexive self performance predominates, presentation of multiple selves in the same or in different videos is common (see also Strangelove 76). In *Hand Gestures*, for example, Tony Huynh enacts various selves in sequence in the same video. An extremely popular (and notorious) vlogger beyond the time of interest who reflexively enacts multiple selves is Chris Crocker. In his videos from 2007 to the present he enacts a plethora of selves: from 'regular' masculinity to effeminacy to cross-dressing. In one of his videos he speaks about a striving within his "generation" for authentic self presence in online and offline contexts. While putting on mascara he says: "See, personality is the outside. Everyone says it's not the outside that counts, it's the personality. [...] Personality is merely presentation" (ITSCHRISCROCKER, *Chris Crocker – Fuck personality*). This comes closest to a performative view of identity "instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 270).

Nevertheless, in contrast with Michael Strangelove's argument about an "authentic pluralism" of 'equal' selves, I suggest that not all selves carry the same status. In the videos of their *A Day in The Life of Smosh* series, Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla enact themselves in a manner that suggests a documentary relationship with their real lives. In other videos they still claim to be enacting themselves, however, they contextualize the events that are presented in a different manner. The first segment of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* is an example of the latter. Anthony and Ian are playing frisbee in a forest when the frisbee flies into a sewage pipe (Figs. 5.2.20-24). Ian enters to retrieve it, and Anthony follows after a while (Figs. 5.2.25-28). Magically, the pipe brings them back to Anthony's room – the powers of editing make it possible (Figs. 5.2.29-33). The vloggers address each

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other with their real names in the video. The room is also recognizable as being Anthony's to viewers familiar with their channel. Nevertheless, the use of non-diegetic narration, representational instead of presentational performance (Waugh 68), and of shot/reverse-shot and other editing devices communicate that the events we see were constructed to a higher degree than those shown in *A Day in the Live of Smosh*. These devices also communicate a difference between the 'world' of the video's production and the 'world' of the story. Finally, the vloggers could depend on their viewers' general knowledge of the real world to read the events as fictional because sewage pipes can only lead into teenagers' bedrooms in fictional worlds.⁵⁴

Nataly Tran, a successful contemporary vlogger who opened her channel in late 2006, enacts multiple selves in her videos whose status is marked differently in each instance: contemporary and historical, documentary, fictional, and illustrative (e.g. COMMUNITYCHANNEL, *a little example of what goes on inside my head*).

In an essay about spoofs on YouTube, Rebekah Willett observes that "Young people's identities are being performed and defined in commodified environments such as YouTube," and that young people "are using commercial media in their video productions to make statements about themselves." She furthermore notes that "commercial media texts are structuring young people's identity work" ("Consumption, Production, and Online Identities" 66). The screen name BOWIECHICK indicates that this is true to a certain extent: Oliveria presents herself *qua* her fandom of David Bowie. Writing about home dance videos, Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier argue that "the self is equally situated and transgressed on the basis of the repetition of references from popular culture" (201). While situating self, as in the name BOWIECHICK, has been the focus of this subchapter, performing an other will be in focus of the next. I will also raise the question if pop culture in general is the referent of such "repetitions" or rather the videos of other vloggers.

⁵⁴ According to Vivian Sobchack the viewer is always "immersed in history and in a culture in which there is general social consensus not only as to the ontological status (if not the interpretation) of what stands as profilmic reality but also as to the hermeneutic rules that govern how one is to read and take up its representation" (*Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley: U of California Press, 2004. 272. Qtd. in Flückiger 286).

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I regard an enactment which is marked as a presentation of a real-world person distinct from the performer, of a fictional character, type, etc. as a performance of an other. Such performances are marked in the audiovisual material itself or in paratexts on YouTube or beyond. ‘Performing an other’ is not to be confused with ‘performing the Other,’ that is with performance that presents an ethnic, gendered, or sexual opposite: an other that is constructed as inferior but also constitutive of the self (see e.g. Said 1). In her definition of “transfigurative szenische Darstellung” Schneider insists on the fictionality of the ‘material’ that is performed and on the creation of an illusion through the performance (138, 159). ‘Performing an other’ sounds less bulky and is also meant to encompass non-fictional performances, like enactments of other real-world people, which are accounted for by neither of the original terms, and performances that do not achieve or attempt to achieve an illusion. Like in the case of “szenische Selbstdarstellung” I drop ‘scenic’ from “transfigurative szenische Darstellung” (138).

Three groups of performances of an other

The performances of others in the videos of the corpus – including regular vlogs and unacknowledged fictional vlogs – can be distributed into three different groups: original fictional characters, adapted fictional characters, and impersonations. Both the performances of the first and the second group are the results of “acting” in the established sense of the “creation” of fictional “character[s]” (Kuhn and Westwell, “acting”).

In *Ghetto Space*, one of the first BROOKERS videos released in September 2005, we encounter a conversation between a ghetto kid and an emo girl⁵⁵ enacted by the vlogger Brooke Brodack and her sister Melissa. In *Paste !!!!!* Brooke performs as a child whose favorite food is glue (Fig. 4.2.1). Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla enact a teenager named Alan and Mr. Franklin, his girlfriend Amy’s father, in *How Not to Make a First Impression* (Figs. 2.3.1-2). In *Smosh Short 2: Stranded*

⁵⁵ ‘Emo’ was a minor American youth culture in the early 2000s that was stereotypically associated with black clothing, side-swept bangs, emotional instability, and a taste for alternative rock music.

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Padilla enacts a castaway on a deserted island (Fig. 2.4.12). Pedro Morbeck's Chipmunk Chick videos are the main example of the creation of original fictional characters on regular video blogs in this study.

EMOKID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21 were started by Ben Johnson and a friend – two British university students – in April 2006. In their videos they performed as members of the American emo youth culture falling in love with each other (Fig. 4.2.2). Unlike in the cases of the other original characters mentioned thus far, there were no signals about the 'true' status of the performance and about the fictionality of the characters from the producers in the audiovisual material or in paratexts: Profilmic presentation and video production were meant to pass as the work of the characters. Johnson and his collaborator thus created early 'fakes,' or unacknowledged fictional vlogs. They were found out by viewers who located their real MySpace profiles at the end of the same month and subsequently acknowledged the fictionality of the characters in their videos (see next section in detail). Further unacknowledged fictional vlogs were started in May: LITTLELOCA and, famously, LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST.



4.2.1-2 "I like to eat 'em paste." Speaking in a squeaky voice, Brooke Brodack enacts a child in *PASTE !!!!!*. "Not much has been happening in my life. I went to a gig in Clevie the other day." Ben Johnson as an emo youth from Ohio in *My First Video Blog*.

While all of these original characters were original in the sense of not adapting specific characters from other works, they were culturally situated in a general sense: EMOKID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21 combined the diarist style of BOWIECHICK with stereotypes about emo youth

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culture (see footnote 55). As Chipmunk Chick, Morbeck oscillated between the diarists and the titillation of FILTHYWHORE and SEXXIE-BEBE23, video blogs that were very popular in spring 2006 but not online at the time of corpus formation.⁵⁶

Apart from creating original fictional characters, users also adapted fictional characters from movies and from other YouTube channels. Brooke Brodack performed as Harry Potter in the video *That hary potter movie*. Morbeck adapted the characters of all unacknowledged fictional vlogs from the corpus before or after they were found out. While he retrospectively said that the emo kids initially “looked real” to him “as they did to everybody else” (*My YouTube Story / Morbeck*), he already appears to have had some doubts when making *Emokid21-Ohio proves he’s American*, which parodied the character Matt’s attempt to prove his American citizenship (Fig. 4.2.3).



4.2.3 Morbeck's *Emokid21Ohio proves he's American*: “License plate from California. I know this is in Ohio, but big fucking deal.”

The third group are impersonations of real-world people of YouTube or general fame. In *CRAZED NUMA FAN !!!!* Brooke impersonated the Internet celebrity Gary Brolsma, also known as the Numa Numa guy.⁵⁷ Morbeck impersonated the vloggers of NORRNA (*Tea with Norrna*) and of BOH3M3 (*Boh3m3, now this IS a spoof*). He actually uses the term

⁵⁶ See “Most Subscribed Members” of “All Time” at the Internet Archive on May 17, 2006.

⁵⁷ Brolsma uploaded *Numa Numa*, a video of himself dancing and lip syncing to a Moldavian pop song, onto the platform Newgrounds.com in late 2004. This video became the object of numerous parodic impersonations throughout 2005 and 2006 on Newgrounds and later on YouTube (Feuer and George).

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“impersonation” for this kind of performance in the former video. In *LisaNova does Keira Knightley* Lisa Donovan and a friend impersonate Keira Knightley and Johnny Depp on the set of *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Virtually all character adaptations and impersonations make fun of the original character or real-world person and can thus be conceived of as parodic performance videos or spoofs (see p. 103; see also Willett, “Parodic Practices” 116).



4.2.4 *LisaNova Does Keira Knightley*: “Let’s play a game, Johnny. It’s called ‘Who’s prettier?’ I’m prettier!”

The fictional characters on EMOKID21OHIO, EMOGIRL21, LITTLELOCA, LONELYGIRL15, and DANIELBEAST organized an entire channel including all videos and the channel page. Chipmunk Chick appeared in about a third of the videos on MORBECK. There are characters that had a one-time appearance only, such as Morbeck’s adaptations of EMOKID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21, and Brodack’s ghetto kid and glue-loving child. There are characters – in sketch comedy clips in particular – who do not claim to be running a vlog and should not be referred to as fictional vlogger characters accordingly: The clumsy teenager and his date’s dad in *How Not to Make a First Impression* and the castaway in *Smosh Short 2: Stranded* do not claim to be running vlogs for instance. Fictionality in early YouTube culture presents itself as a huge field that was not limited to the figure of the unacknowledged fictional vlogger character who organized a complete channel, which may be the impression we get when looking at journalist and some scholarly engagements with YouTube (e.g. Rushfield and Hoffman, “Mystery Fuels Popularity of Web’s Lonelygirl15;” Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 28-29, Christian).

Acknowledgment of performing an other

A distinction between performances whose status as performances of others was acknowledged by the users running the channels and those for which this was not the case can be made. Devices for making performances of others pass as self performances and their ultimate failure (Christian; Flemming; Kuhn, "Medienreflexives Erzählen im Internet" 19-20) and devices for emphasizing the 'authentic' status of actual self performances (Christian; Strangelove 65) have been research foci thus far. The fact that most performances of others in the corpus did in fact communicate their status as such invites an analysis of the devices used: How was the status of a performance of an other communicated in early YouTube culture?

All impersonations and adaptations of characters in the corpus acknowledged their status as performances of others. In order to work in the intended manner, these enactments had to be legible as performances of specific others and not as self enactments of the performer. Creators of parodic performance videos from the UK explicitly voiced this understanding when interviewed by Rebekah Willett: The impersonated person or adapted character had to be identifiable ("Parodic Practices" 125); and the users of the present study also made sure that it was. An unmistakable way of acknowledging 'it' was to announce the relation between performer and enacted 'figure' in the video title as in *LisaNova Does Keira Knightley*.

The distinction thus makes itself most prominently felt in the context of performances of original fictional characters. The vast majority of performances of such characters in the corpus were acknowledged. EMOKID21OHIO, EMOGIRL21, LITTLELOCA, LONELYGIRL15, and DANIEL-BEAST, however, started out as unacknowledged fictional video blogs; that is, the producers of these channels initially concealed the fact that fictional characters were enacted in the videos, that the embodied 'figures' who claimed to be running these channels were not actually running them. Their unacknowledged fictionality became a point of contention for parts of their viewership when they were found out (see next section).

The status of the characters on MORBECK was acknowledged by a non-illusionist manner of performance throughout: The sound effect that shifted the pitch of Pedro Morbeck's voice to perform Chipmunk Chick, Trixie Love, and Alicia vaguely suggested female characters but by no means sounded like the voices of actual women. Morbeck did

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not conceal the amble hair on the back of his hands and his forearms when performing these characters (see Figs. 4.2.4). In these videos evidence of a reality that could not be understood as a part of the world of Chipmunk Chick and the other characters was given. The self and his world were, to some extent, presented at the same time as the world of the characters was presented. Like in the rare cases of fictional performances in home movies (Schneider 137), there was an incomplete disguise and thus a mixed reality presented.



4.2.5 Pedro Morbeck enacts Chipmunk Chick – and shows his hairy arms all the while (*I was abused by Filthy Whore*).

While the performer's self was partially shown in the shots of Chipmunk Chick and Alicia in *The Cat fight* (Figs. 2.1.13-14), Morbeck also 'explicitly' appeared as himself in a third group of shots (Fig. 2.1.15). In this metaleptic arrangement (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 234-235) the difference between self and other was communicated. In *Beauty Talk Show* Morbeck even made Chipmunk Chick refer to herself as a "character."

In some video titles, for example in *Emokid21Ohio proves he's American*, and some video descriptions third-person narration was used: "[T]his cute little girl spills her guts about some YouTube users" was the video description of *Chipmunk chick*, the first appearance of the character; "Alicia and Chipmunk chick get into a serious fight" introduced *The Cat fight*. The first-person narration in the videos themselves was framed by this level. The status of the enactments as self performances seemed unlikely.

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Taking the channel page and all the posted videos into view, Morbeck appeared as a variety of original and adapted characters, as an impersonator of other vloggers, and as himself in the videos on his channel. The presence of sincere self performances on the channel (Fig. 4.1.1) further suggested a different status for the other performances. On LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST each actor only enacted a single character and never herself/himself.

Performances of others were acknowledged in ways similar to those on MORBECK in the above-mentioned videos on BROOKERS, SMOSH, and LISANOVA. The reactions of producers of unacknowledged fictional vlogs to the discovery of the characters' fictionality can be used to illustrate further ways of acknowledging performing an other in early YouTube culture.

Only three weeks after beginning to post, Ben Johnson and his collaborator put up videos with the titles *The Death Of EmoKid21Ohio* and *The Death of Emogirl* respectively. In these videos they performed as themselves, which included speaking British English. They talked about their fictional video blogs as their holiday projects and that their personal MySpace pages had been located by fans. About six months later both of them released new videos in which they enacted the emo characters. However, unlike in the videos released prior to the discovery, they acknowledged the fictionality now. In *The Return Of EmoKid21Ohio* Johnson played 'Matt' in an exaggerated manner. The character's signature greeting "Hey, its me Matt again" was changed to "Hey, it's me Matt a-gone." Unlike for his previous videos, the performer did not bother speaking an American English that might have passed as American English. There was no attempt of creating the illusion of an American youth giving an account of himself in Ben's performance anymore.

When the *Los Angeles Times* reported that viewers had tracked a message sent from Bree's MySpace account back to a computer at the Creative Artists Agency (Rushfield and Hoffman, "Mystery Fuels Popularity"), the producers of LONELYGIRL15 stepped forth by releasing a post signed "The Creators" in a fan forum and by giving interviews to journalists providing their own names and the names of the actors and information about the background of the project (Rushfield and Hoffman, "Lonelygirl15 Video Blog Is Brainchild of 3 Filmmakers"; Hefferman and Zeller).

Unlike the creators of the emo kids, however, they did not acknowledge the fictionality in the videos that followed. Setting, performance, cinematography, editing, and sound all continued to create the illusion

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of a girl and her best friend giving an account of their lives in the following videos – while slight concessions were made in these regards over time (see p. 250).

On the oldest archived version of the channel page from November 2006, that is, two months after the revelation, Bree still appears as the agency who is providing the channel information and the videos, supported by her friend Daniel: “What can I say? Hmm. My friend Daniel helped me set up this account and he helps me out with the videos (he’s kinda a computer genius).” The diegetic world of Bree and Daniel, if you will, encompassed the videos and the channel page. From April 2007 on, this information and the videos came from an unidentified agency not part of the diegetic world who referred to videos as “episodes,” to the channel page as “The Official LG15 YouTube Page,” and listed Bree and the other characters in the third person. Through this switch from first person to third person narration on the channel page, a level of narration that framed the level of narration in the videos – and thus the constructed nature of the latter level and of Bree and Daniel themselves – were acknowledged.

Key to all of these tactics was the communication of a difference between a self and an other. The message was the following: This, the enactment I am presenting, is not an enactment of myself but of an other. The difference was communicated in the audiovisual material and in paratexts on YouTube and beyond. These ways differed in terms of their mediality: image/sound, voice/complete body, spoken/written language (see also Flückiger 284). They were more or less explicit: Opposing a performer’s name and a character’s name in a video title or video description was probably more explicit than beginning to narrate a character in the third person on a channel page. Also, an impersonation of a popular vlogger or an adaptation of a popular vlogging character communicated its status more clearly than a performance of an original character because it could rely on viewers’ knowledge of YouTube video culture or popular culture in general (see analog Flückiger 275).

Most importantly, these ways of acknowledging the status differed with regards to the distance a viewer had to ‘travel’ to find out, to the width of context that was required to spot the difference between self and other. The video title was probably the most-central location where information about the status of a performance could be found, followed by the video itself. Video descriptions were not prominently presented on video pages or elsewhere on YouTube and probably only read

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during or after watching the video. Beyond the platform were interviews in mainstream news media, forum posts, and other outlets.

Al Gore's Penguin Army, another popular 'fake' uploaded in summer 2006, was an animated parody of *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's documentary about global warming. Allegedly an amateur production, the video is widely believed to be part of a professional campaign against Al Gore's movie, probably sponsored by Exxon Mobile, because an Email sent to the user account TOUTSMITH was answered from a computer of a PR and lobbying company (Regalado and Searcey). However, while an actual amateur animator could not be found, the PR company did not acknowledge its involvement either. Unlike in the cases of the unacknowledged video blogs in the corpus, what seem to be the 'real' contexts of production, were never acknowledged, even though the evidence that critical fans and journalists found against the amateur tale was nearly identical. Strictly speaking, none of the channels EMOKID21OHIO, EMOGIRL21, LONELYGIRL15, DANIELBEAST, and LITTLELOCA is an unacknowledged fictional video blog anymore because in each case the people running the channels and producing the videos stepped forth at some point, acknowledged the fictionality of the figures who had claimed to be running the vlog, and provided information about the contexts of production meticulously hidden from viewers thus far.

Different modes of reception – and viewers' literacy, discontents, and pleasure

From a semio-pragmatic point of view, a cultural artifact is not 'sent' from a producer to a recipient. According to Roger Odin, who coined the method, production in a wider sense is a double process and happening on the side of the actual creation of the artifact and on the side of its reception (42). The producer inscribes information about how he or she wishes a cultural artifact to be understood into the artifact and possibly also into paratexts. A documentary or fictional mode of reception (among others) can thus be aimed for. In the engagement of recipients with an artifact (the second stage of production in the wider sense) an equivalent or a diverging experience may be produced (43). The artifact, paratexts created by the producer and by others, the overall cultural context, and the media literacy of recipients are relevant here (Flückiger 286-287). On each of these sides of production in the wider sense, different modes of reception can be oper-

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ating and interacting at the same time – not the least in audiovisual artifacts which are simultaneously operating on different levels: image and sound, spoken and written language, artifact and paratext (Flückiger 284) – , and in sequence, for example in the case of the different segments of *The Cat fight*.

The distinction between acknowledged and unacknowledged performances of an other put a strong emphasis on the agency of the users running the channels and producing the videos. However, for triggering a specific mode of reception in a particular historical situation, statements from other people are relevant as well of course: viewers of LONELYGIRL15 videos who investigated contexts of production and journalists who reported on these investigations; viewers who wrote (and still write) comments that denounce videos on LONELYGIRL15 and similar channels as ‘fake.’

The focus on the activities of the contributing users was justified because the discontents of a number of viewers about the unacknowledged fictionality centered around their activities, to be witnessed in a comment to *House Arrest*, a LONELYGIRL15 video released immediately after the discovery: “What I do see wrong is the inherent deception that was and is present here. By not making any indication to the global viewing public that this is a storyline, I believe the writers, actors and perhaps YouTube itself, has misled the public” (FIRES-MILE01). The notion that the unacknowledged fictional status of the project might be shady or “wrong” was not just a self-righteous whim of viewers who had been fooled: The producers of LONELYGIRL15 themselves had such worries, which is why they took a lawyer on board from early on. “Is this legal?” was a question Mesh Flinders and Miles Beckett asked Greg Goodfried on their first meeting. A very concrete piece of advice they got was not to sell merchandise because someone might sue them for “false advertisement” (Davis).

Interestingly, on the side of viewers, both fictional and documentary modes of reception are still operating for all formerly unacknowledged video blogs today. This becomes evident when we look at recent comments attracted by the first video uploaded to each of these channels: These videos are still receiving comments from unsuspecting viewers, that is, there are still viewers who believe the veracity of the claims from the fictional characters. It is important in this context that the contributing users did not boast the ‘true’ status of the performance on the first video’s web page itself after they were found out. The amount of unsuspecting comments appears to depend on the degree to which these channels were ‘canonized’ as examples of web hoaxes.

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Since its discovery, early LONELYGIRL15 videos have been watched primarily for the reason that they were 'fake;' that is, viewers approach the channel and the videos knowing about the 'true' status of the performances and the diegetic claims of production (Kuhn, "Medienreflexives filmisches Erzählen im Internet" 20). There are fewer unsuspecting comments on LONELYGIRL15 than on DANIELBEAST or EMOKID21OHIO.

The degree of media literacy of a viewer with regards to specific cases of 'fakes,' to YouTube video culture in general, and to the broader cultural context is relevant to how a video is read (see Strangelove 64). Familiarity with regular vlogs was crucial for early doubters of the authenticity of Bree during its unacknowledged period. Some viewers felt that lighting, editing, and the use of music were too slick when compared to regular vlogs. Bree, moreover, seemed to be 'too' attractive to be real: "All you need to know is that this chick is ridiculously cute! Therefore she is an actress and getting paid."⁵⁸ Significantly also, Brian Flemming, who offered a detailed analysis of the channel on his text blog two weeks before the IP discovery, had directed a mockumentary before: The story and its narration in two of her videos seemed implausible to him and made him debunk the veracity of Bree's claims. However, in spite of being in a very privileged position in terms of media literacy, Flemming wrote that he had believed Bree thus far.

Fake controversies arise now and then over different kinds of audiovisual artifacts. In his feature film *JFK*, Oliver Stone used documentary footage and footage of a constructed profilmic event which was made to look like documentary footage – without giving his viewers any hints to distinguish between the two sorts of material (Flückiger 289). In fake controversies, a cultural artifact triggers a particular mode of reception and does not contextualize this within a larger framework that might prompt recipients to recognize the true status of the material. This status is eventually discovered by others. Fake controversies, then, arise out of a breach of the "communicative pact" between producers (or distributors) and viewers (Casetti 26).

Viewers were by no means unanimous in a moralist dismissal of LONELYGIRL15 (see also Christian). Some felt they had lost a dear friend. Some claimed they had known it all along: "There was always

⁵⁸ Qtd. in Christian. See Christian also for an analysis of these discussions.

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something very preposterous about her videos from the start. A first time video blogger who has some of the best shot, lit and edited videos from day 1 of posting” (FREDFLINT75). Others said the real or fake question did not matter because it was just the question between one kind of entertainment or another: “So, congrats on another interesting film Lonelygirl15, be it real or not” (KYRANI).⁵⁹ For a significant number of viewers, then, nothing much seemed to be at stake. Response to *Al Gore’s Penguin Army* by contrast, which was probably part of a corporate lobbying campaign, was generally dismissive and harsh. More seemed to be at stake in that case.

Bypassing the ethical question, I wish to remark that those performances of others that acknowledged their status all along are probably more interesting to watch than the sincere self performances on BOWIECHICK and the slick simulation on LONELYGIRL15. The mentioned strategies of acknowledging ‘it’ constitute a big creative potential to be witnessed in videos on MORBECK, SMOSH, BROOKERS, RENETTO, and LISANOVA. Triggering different modes of reception in sequence or at the same time can generate heightened pleasure for viewers of a film (Flückiger 286), and the same is true for YouTube videos.

Morbeck’s viewers were watching Chipmunk Chick and its performer at the same time, with shifting emphases (Fig. 4.2.5). Some felt challenged, while others enjoyed this particular experience: “i love how he looks all girly, then appear the BIG HAIRY MANLY ARMSSSS OF DOOM!” (DONTTREADZEPPELIN, comment accessed 2 August 2013). In Morbeck’s *Walk in the neighborhood*, Chipmunk Chick promises to show her house and the houses of her neighbors where she uses to “hang out at.” However, Morbeck did not fly from Brazil to the US to record footage in an American middle-class neighborhood, which would have been consistent with the all-American Chipmunk Chick character. Instead he presented the Brasília upper-class gated community he and his parents were living in as Chipmunk Chick’s neighborhood. Evidently, something is ‘wrong’ in the video. Such an inconsistency would be inconceivable in the “very realistic” storytelling of LONELYGIRL15 (Beckett qtd. in Rushfield and Hoffman, “Lonelygirl15 Video Blog Is Brainchild of 3 Filmmakers”): Bree is a middle-class

⁵⁹ Both comments posted to the LONELYGIRL15 video *House Arrest*.

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character, with middle-class interests, living in a middle-class neighborhood – consistent, but also predictable.

In *EmoSpace* the Brodack sisters perform as themselves but also refer to themselves as others. Melissa addresses Brooke as Brooke at the beginning of the video. Towards the end she asks Brooke if she remembers “that girl Brooke” who has a moderate following on MySpace. Brooke answers: “I think so. She’s like... the emo queen.” Then Melissa suggests: “Let’s go visit Brooke’s MySpace.” We cannot say if this is an intended simultaneity of performing self and other or simply a ‘mistake.’

Such peculiarities of modes of performance in sequence or at the same time struck me when first exploring YouTube. Such peculiarities of performance may in fact be characteristic of the viewing pleasure of early YouTube videos.

Creative responses to the ‘fake’ issue

It will be clear by now that performing an other in early YouTube culture encompassed a large spectrum of performances of which the unacknowledged fictional performance simulating a self performance – which received a lot of media and academic attention – was only one example of many. This brief section wants to present playful engagements with the couplet performing self and other in video bloggers’ responses to the controversy over LONELYGIRL15 and other unacknowledged fictional vlogs.

The day after the unveiling of LONELYGIRL15, Paul Robinett performed as a new character on his RENETTO channel in the video *PLEASE FORGIVE ME... FOR WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY*. This character introduces himself as Trevor Whatever, a scholar writing a dissertation in psychology and anthropology about the YouTube “community” at the University of Oxford. Trevor says he manipulated viewers by creating numerous fictional characters, among others Paul Robinett. By speaking in a mock-British accent and choosing a funny name, Robinett acknowledged the fictionality of Trevor Whatever and this particular coming out as a joke.

Robinett’s video prompted the vlogger of IHEARTSLUG to “come clean as well” in a video response posted to his video (*Re: PLEASE FORGIVE ME... FOR WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY*). She presents herself in her untidy bedroom as in other videos, but in this video she claims the setting is generated by chroma key. In reality, she says, she is living in

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a “beautiful Italian villa.” Recording her chubby body in the mirror, she also says these images of herself are generated via “CGI”; in reality she is “a lady supermodel” (Fig. 4.2.6). The reflexive dialogue thus communicated an identity that contradicted all other visual and aural cues in the present and in previous videos.

A video entitled *geriatric1927 is a Fake!* was released on the channel SKEWTUBEVIDEOS several months after LONELYGIRL15 was found out. It consists of sloppily edited material from GERIATRIC1927 and television reports about the uncovering of LONELYGIRL15 and is accompanied by a voice-over from the videomaker. Tongue-in-cheek the video reports that the pensioner Peter Oakley is played by a 19-year-old actress and that the channel is the project of three aspiring videomakers, which was of course the story behind LONELYGIRL15. A still revealing what the performer of GERIATRIC1927 ‘really’ looks like is a makeshift collage of a young woman’s body with the head of Peter Oakley superimposed on it (Fig. 4.2.7).



4.2.6-7 The vlogger of IHEARTSLUG: “This is actually CGI. This is my YouTube personality. In real life I’m a lady supermodel.” Peter Oakley, the vlogger of GERIATRIC1927, ‘revealed’ to be enacted by a 19-year-old actress on the channel SKEWTUBEVIDEOS.

In the MORBECK video *My Real Sex*, Chipmunk Chick breaks out in tears and ‘comes out’ as Pedro Morbeck by taking off the blonde wig; the ‘helium’ effect that raised the performer’s voice to create the voice of Chipmunk Chick stops at the same time (Fig. 4.2.8). Morbeck, speaking in his regular voice, announces he has “one more thing” to confess. He takes off his base cap revealing a brunette wig while the helium effect is turned on again (Fig. 4.2.9). The brunette character

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says she is a girl pretending to be a guy playing a blonde identifying as a chipmunk. Then, adding a further confessional stage, she says that she had her sex changed in the past. In a final attempt to say who she 'really' is, she gets confused and gives up. Embracing the undecided ontological status of her identity, she puts on sunglasses and cheerfully goes to the mall.



4.2.8-9 *My Real Sex*: Chipmunk Chick reveals that she is Morbeck who subsequently reveals that he is a brunette woman, 'really'.

All of these videos responded to the overall suspicion that vloggers encountered in the wake of the LONELYGIRL15 controversy.⁶⁰ Unlike some of the comments quoted earlier, they did not pass moral judgment about LONELYGIRL15 and other 'fakes.' They engaged the couplet performing self and performing an other, and ways of communicating the status of a performance in a self-reflexive and creative manner. It should be added that all performances of an other in these videos were acknowledged, not the least because they were released in the context of previous and future videos that allowed an appropriate reading.

⁶⁰ In *Blunty isn't Australian* Nate Burr provides an example of numerous "theories" about his 'true' identity by reading out a letter from a viewer. The viewer claims that Burr is an American "actor paid by some acting company to make videos on here." The 'evidence' he puts forward are Burr's knowledge of "American culture, history, government, showbiz, and general knowledge" and his "unique editing skills" which, according to the viewer, indicate that he can neither be an Australian nor a producing performer who is working on his own.

Modes of Performance: Halftime

While it goes without saying that there were individual preferences, typically, the video bloggers from the corpus performed as themselves and as others in the videos released on their channels. Video blogging was not a practice of confessional self performances that was corrupted by the insincerity of unacknowledged fictional video blogs but a practice in which different modes of performance were creatively employed from the very beginning.

Interestingly, the performers on unacknowledged fictional vlogs never added a further level of representation; that is, they did not play vlogging characters who played characters or impersonated real-world people. The performances within the unacknowledged frame thus did not have the richness of performances of regular vlogs.

After performing self and other – two of four modes of performance in video blogging – have been discussed, it may be useful to pull a couple of threads together and to pose a couple of further thoughts.

Agency and the politics of representing oneself

The launch of YouTube in 2005 needs to be seen in the context of the re-emerging idea of giving a voice to ‘ordinary’ people, and of the proliferation of reality formats on television since the late 1990s. This proliferation manifested problems of speaking of oneself that had been part of the discourse around autobiographical literature and film for a long time. Ordinary people, finally as it seemed given a voice, often entered the spotlight only to be ridiculed, misunderstood, and appropriated for purposes not their own (Currid-Halkett 208). YouTube explicitly invited users to “Broadcast” themselves and provided them with a platform to do so. However, as we have seen, YouTube users did not unconditionally follow the site’s slogan. From the onset, the platform has been put to use not only in terms of but also against the manner the “Broadcast Yourself” tried to mold performances. I want to give two examples to illustrate how aware the vloggers of the corpus were that giving an account of oneself is a precarious enterprise – and of their ways of employing the couplet performing self and performing other to manage its risks.

In the video *Sucks* Melody Oliveria of BOWIECHICK appears with a swollen and red face. Breaking out in tears she says that a girl verbally and physically attacked her in the streets for running a vlog. She says

she considers to stop vlogging and to set all her videos to private. This would have meant rejecting the agency of public distribution offered by the platform because of problems encountered while using it. In the next video, however, she contextualizes her previous performance as a “fake.” We can understand her performance in *Sucks* as a performance of a fictional self, a self whose fictionality is acknowledged afterwards. The crucial point is that the vlogger went to this extreme level of openly exposing herself in none of her other videos: While she primarily performed and thus presented herself, these performances never reached the level of emotional exhibition we encounter in the fictional performance of *Sucks*. On the level of content this video indicates an awareness of the implications of public performance; that is, of the chances of being hurt. On the level of the manner of presentation – in comparison with her usual restraint – it gives us an idea of how well this performer was in control of how much of herself she was presenting and how.

Unlike in *To the fans and haters* – his earliest example of a personal video – Pedro Morbeck did not use an emphatic self performance but a fictional character to make statements about himself in several later videos. In this way he delegated agency to a voice that was an other. He created a distance between himself and the voice that appeared to be doing the work. Should such a statement be regarded as an authoritative self account? It might just be the opinion of a fictional character about the performer. But this uncertainty appears to be a part of the tactic: It created a net of security for the performer. *Asian Complaint* deals with offensive comments, YouTube’s refusal to feature Morbeck’s videos, and the challenges of being a “director, creator, writer, actor, editor, uploader” all at the same time. These concerns are presented by a whiny character who speaks of Morbeck in the third person, as in: “Morbeck is very disappointed.” Probably because he was not sure if viewers would get this strategy, he let the character explain it at the end of the video: “This is just the experiment of a sad character. Even though what the character is expressing is actually what the creator feels like.” While being a personal statement in a general sense, it formally differs from the majority of self performances. In some sense this tactic enabled very open statements, because the character rather than the performer could be held accountable. The strategy of speaking frankly by speaking as an other is employed in various works – from Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* to Guillermo Verdecchia’s *Fronteras Americanas*.

In *Amateure im Netz* Ramón Reichert theorizes YouTube and other Web 2.0 platforms from a Foucaultian point of view. Platforms like YouTube urge people to present themselves and to provide information about themselves (7). Reichert does not understand the relationship between affordances and practices in a determinist manner (“determinierte Beziehung”) but as a strategic power relationship which remains open (“strategische Machtbeziehung, die offen bleibt”). He calls for a differentiated view at user practices and, quoting Dieter Daniels, for an argumentation which is closely tracing practices.⁶¹ However, Reichert’s own study does not live up to these expectations: While YouTube is part of the argument, actual videos do not come into view. Statements about user activities are of a generalizing nature. Moreover, the degree to which people are actually being controlled or determined by such structures is assessed divergently in these statements in different parts of the study.⁶² Here, as in other parts of my study (e.g. 3.1 Settings, p. 130), the analysis of user activities leads to an assessment of a relatively high user autonomy: Successful video bloggers in the early days of YouTube were in control of what they presented and how.

Were ‘fakes’ commercial and corporate?

In discussions of LONELYGIRL15 and other ‘fakes’ on YouTube and beyond, several issues intertwine which should be kept apart:

- performing self / performing an other,
- the agency of the performer (producing performers / ‘executing’ performers),
- the different dimensions of the amateur/professional divide, especially the questions of a financial motivation and of production within the established media industries (see p. 72-79).

⁶¹ “[Es] bleibt allein der Weg einer dicht an ihrer Praxis verlaufenden Argumentation” (Daniels 27, qtd. Reichert 34).

⁶² At times, confessional self performances determined by affordances seem to be the rule (7). At other times, users’ autonomy receives a relatively high assessment (34).

Modes of Performance: Halftime

Burgess and Green, for example, state that LONELYGIRL15 – in spite of presenting an ‘inauthentic’ character – “bore many of the markers of authentic amateur participation,” as if a mode of performance and an ‘amateur’ mode of production were correlative (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 95).

A prominent assumption from suspicious viewers like Brian Fleming was that the project was a “viral promotional campaign for a mainstream product.” After the revelation of LONELYGIRL15’s fictionality then, the trio behind the project had to emphasize that they were working with next to no budget and – except for their recent representation through an agency – unrelated to corporate media, i.e. that they were independent media producers (qtd. in Rushfield).

Even in the case of EMOKID21OHIO a comment writer claimed that Ben Johnson “was a paid actor.”⁶³ Yet EMOKID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21, the first known YouTube ‘fakes,’ were run solely by the people performing in the videos, and no commercial interests or connections with the industry were involved.

The vast majority of original fictional characters in the corpus were in fact invented by their performers who were also the producers of videos and the people running the channels. Such was the case for the characters on BROOKERS, MORBECK, and RENETTO, as well as for the unacknowledged fictional video blogs EMOKID21OHIO, EMOGIRL21, and LITTLELOCA. As channels on which the characters were invented by writers/producers and enacted by ‘executing’ performers, LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST are not the rule but the exception. The assumption in ‘fake’ controversies that these issues correlate would need further attention in a study with a different scope.

⁶³ Comment by JDHOFFA on *My First Video Blog*, accessed 5 Aug. 2013.

4.3 The Presentation of Skills

Like performing self and performing an other, the presentation of skills and the representation of accidents were complementary modes of performance in video blogging. Schneider uses “artistische Darbietung,” i.e. ‘artistic presentation,’ to speak about athletic, musical, and dance displays in home movies (140-144). Therefore, in spite of the use of “artistische,” her concept contains displays of skills of various kinds. For simplicity’s sake then, I use ‘presentation of skills’ to refer to this mode. In the following, the focus will be on a particular question, on the question of the relationship between YouTube skills and skills in other contexts with two skills as case studies: lip sync and musical performance.

Lip sync performances on video blogs – and elsewhere

In the music industry there are two distinct uses of lip syncing; that is, of the synchronous movement of a performer’s lips with a voice recording. The first is (largely) acknowledged and the other unacknowledged.

Music videos are produced to promote a record, thus the record – instead of a live recording of the piece of music – is presented in integrity on the sound track of the music video. Nevertheless, in many music videos instrumentalists and vocalists are shown ‘playing’ musical instruments and ‘singing.’ The vocalists are moving their lips in sync with the voice recording of the record when the images are shot. In postproduction the original record is used as a sound track for the music video. Typically, this use of lip syncing is acknowledged in the video itself, for example through a ‘missing’ microphone in the mise-en-scene, spatially discontinuous editing with a continuous voice track – i.e. the performer is ‘singing’ in one location in one shot and in another in the next – , or because the performer lip syncs only parts of the lyrics and does not move her/his lips while other parts are sung on the record on the sound track.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Many examples could be provided for these devices; all of them are used in the classic 1990s video for The Smashing Pumpkins’ “Bullet With Butterfly Wings” (dir. Samuel Bayer, 1995).

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Lip syncing is also used in the production of material contextualized as audiovisual footage of a musical live performance to achieve a better quality than a sound recording of an actual live performance would under the same circumstances. Deficits of the performer's vocal capacities or of the recording environment can be the reason for a performer's lip syncing along with a voice recording. This use of lip syncing is not acknowledged, that is, the performance is meant to be read as an actual vocal performance. Cases in which vocalists do not convincingly lip sync are sometimes recontextualized as 'fakes' or 'fails' on YouTube and elsewhere (see e.g. WATCHMOJO, *Top 10 Lip Sync Fails*).

What links both of these industry forms of lip syncing and distinguishes them from lip syncing on video blogs is the understanding that the performer we see is the same person whose voice we hear – even if in the case of music videos it is understood that this person recorded her/his voice in a studio and not while standing in a diamond mine or on a volcano. Constitutive of lip sync performances in video blogging is the mismatch between lip syncer and vocalist. This mismatch is at the heart of this kind of presentation's production, mediality, phenomenology, viewer experience, and its cultural function.

Lip syncing in the music industry is an unrepresentable skill. Especially in the 'live' performance variety, invisibility of the skill is the greatest possible achievement of its execution. There are probably few professional musicians who would boast their competences of lip syncing – even though this skill is necessary for music video production (and for faking live performances). In video blogging, by contrast, lip syncing was a highly presentable skill. The lip syncing itself was the skill presented in the videos.

The textual and paratextual communication of the mismatch between lip syncer and vocalist shows similarities to the acknowledgment of performing an other (chapter 4.2). The video title could communicate that a vlogger was lip syncing along with somebody else's voice recording (e.g. *Gay God lip sync another gay sunshine day*). The video itself could communicate the mismatch through differences of sex or age between singer and lip syncer, for example in *Hey clip* on TASHA (Fig. 4.3.1); and the fascination of lip syncing on video blogs seems to have stemmed in part from such differences (see also Peters and Seier 197–199). Finally, a lip syncer could depend on viewers' pop cultural knowledge of the artist's image for a recognition of the mismatch.

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4.3.1-2 The vlogger of TASHA lip syncing along the line “and the whores in my head” from The Pixies’ “Hey.” The vlogger of GAYGOD lip syncing a Janet Jackson track.

There were probably two main parameters that characterized this skill in video blogging and in terms of which achievement was possible. Unsurprisingly, the first was synchronicity of the lip movements with the voice recording. Vloggers aimed at synchronicity – and their viewers valued synchronicity.⁶⁵ The vloggers of BROOKERS, SMOSH, and TASHA attained a relatively high degree of synchronicity, while Matthew Lush of GAYGOD was roughly synchronous with the lyrics on the record.

The second parameter was the quality of the relationship between performance and record. When a musician (on YouTube or elsewhere) plays/sings a cover version of a sound recording of a musical piece by someone else, the cultural artifact is fully embodied; it remains recognizable as an intertextual work only through paratextual information like a video title or through viewers’ pop cultural knowledge. In a lip sync performance, by contrast, a vlogger entered a relationship with an artifact that maintained a dualist character throughout. The musical piece and sound recording were at once embodied (via the lip movement) and remained external (because the singer’s voice could still be heard in the video).

⁶⁵ See comment on TASHA’s *Hey clip* by DJWIGGYD: “hey good editing skills, lips matched perfectly” (video page accessed 13 March 2009).

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The mismatch of singer and lip syncer in the lip sync video opened up a space in which various things could happen. Identification in terms of fandom, parody, and a playful engagement with the gendered subjectivities offered by the record were only the most-obvious options. In most cases it seems that things were less clear or altogether different. This space was constitutive of lip syncing on video blogs – and not present in the industry forms of lip syncing. The way a vlogger gave shape to this space appears to have been the second parameter of her or his achievement in the skill of lip syncing.⁶⁶

A particular engagement with the record – probably one of parody more than homage – could involve a distancing from the record by lip syncing only some of the lyrics, lip syncing with little accuracy, or by making exaggerated lip movements. Thus there was probably a give-and-take between the two parameters.

Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier have conducted an analysis of home dance and also found a relative cultural autonomy of the YouTube practice with regards to dancing in professional music videos and stage performances. They find it “questionable whether the so-called amateurs judge themselves according to professional standards” (193). YouTube users judge according to “unforeseen criteria which also vary greatly depending on the priorities of the individual communities” (201).

Musical performances on video blogs – and elsewhere

What about actual musical performances in videos on vlogs (see 2.3 Kinds of Videos)? Structural differences between these performances and musical live performances in other contexts that are audiovisually recorded, distributed, and shown are not conspicuous: Musical instruments and voices are used to perform cover versions and original pieces, and the footage is publicly shown.

Amiee Jacobsen joined YouTube in August 2005, which makes her a very early user of the platform. She mainly uploaded musical performance videos of cover versions and original songs with herself

⁶⁶ Rebekah Willett’s study of spoofs on YouTube is also making a point about the complexity of this relationship (“Parodic Practices” 116, 121-123). An analysis of the shape of this space in a couple of lip sync videos could be the object of a study with a smaller scope.

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singing and/or playing an electric piano in her apartment. She also uploaded a couple of public diary clips and a largely demonstrational clip of herself playing a carillon keyboard. When joining YouTube, Jacobsen had been playing the piano for 25 years. She frequently played for friends and family. She had also “worked as a pianist for school districts” and churches (“Re: Research on video blogs,” 3 Sept. 2013). She is another example of a vlogger who was skilled, to a certain extent, already when joining YouTube.

Her a cappella cover version of the soul classic “What Are You Doing New Year’s Eve?” was uploaded on December 27 and selected to be shown on YouTube’s front page. It became an early YouTube hit with more than 300.000 clicks, which was a lot before YouTube’s attaining of mainstream popularity in summer 2006 (Fig. 4.3.3). The video *an act of drunken aggression on an innocent keyboard* shows her singing and playing “More,” a song she says she wrote when in college, and a Boogie Woogie standard (Fig. 4.3.4). Her performance is introduced by a disclaimer: She says she is drunk and sick, that her piano is running through a set of computer speakers which make it “sound like garbage,” and that she quickly fixed her pedal with tape.



4.3.3-4 Amiee Jacobsen in *new year's eve* and *an act of drunken aggression on an innocent keyboard*.

Both performances received almost universal praise: The choice and “rendition” of the New Year’s song (DREAMMAKER), the songwriting of “More” (BOB99; WENDYELIZABETH), the singing (XOXOSTEFXOXO; WEN-

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DYELIZABETH), and the piano playing (SP0IL3DBR8T).⁶⁷ Did these viewers judge Jacobsen's performances as they might have judged the performance of, for example, The Rolling Stones at the 2006 Super Bowl halftime show? Probably they didn't. While address and distribution/exhibition were public, and – unlike in the case of a private performance – everyone could judge and comment, the domestic setting probably lowered judgment and standards. I suggest that public concerts in schools or local bars or clubs (or recordings of such events) are appropriate contexts to compare these presentations to in terms of the level of the quality standard.

It deserves note that several viewers who wrote comments suggested Jacobsen should record her own music herself or try to get a record deal (DREAMMAKER; BLUENIGHTFOG; REMIX21). She responded that her “dream job would be to sing with a swing band” and that getting a record contract is not “that easy. baby steps, mister.” But then, this is what many teenagers and people of all ages hoped and hope for their local heroes, for bands in which a friend or classmate is playing, or that they know because they are regularly playing at a local venue.

Keith Richards devotes many pages of his autobiography to the days when he and Mick Jagger listened to blues records at home, playing and singing along, trying to find out just how the respective musicians far away in Chicago or elsewhere in the US played their music (80-81, 103-109). During a holiday with Jagger's parents in Devon they played at a village pub (85-86). The early Rolling Stones played “at end-of-year school dances” (103), pubs, and other small venues in London for little or no money. They played interludes at several more prestigious clubs for free, hoping to raise attention (111). An important step was attaining a weekly spot at The Crawdaddy Club in Richmond (113). Richards also relates that the equipment – acoustic guitars with an attached pickup and amps built from radios – were always on the edge; he had to solder between songs (89). Bass player Bill Wyman's joining was important because he had a genuine amplifier into which several instruments were plugged (103). Like during their early days The Beatles, cover versions were played. Even on their first album (128-129) and first tours cover versions dominated (143-144). Would The Rolling Stones have welcomed a medium that enabled them to record performances at home – where Jagger, Richards, and later

⁶⁷ All comments in this section accessed 3 Nov. 2009.

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Brian Jones were practicing and rehearsing anyway (99) – and to show them to a potentially global audience during this time? They probably would.

Writing about two successful musical performance videos on YouTube, Jean Burgess argues that the “virtuosic bedroom musical performance” is a “genre” which is “paradigmatic of user-created content on YouTube” and draws on “the long traditions of vernacular creativity articulated to ‘privatized’ media use” and is “deeply situated in everyday, even mundane creative traditions.” Just like in the cases of the other proponents of the everyday creativity paradigm, “media consumption” and not production is the suggested framing (107, 108). This begs the question just when exactly The Rolling Stones turned from amateur, vernacular, everyday, ordinary, and private consumers into professional, extraordinary, and public producers.

The parallels between Amiee Jacobsen and The Rolling Stones in their early days illustrate just how inappropriate the everyday creativity framing is. It seems that there is a path that is trodden by most young people who play popular music. Naturally, for most of them this path does not culminate in the Rock’n’roll Hall of Fame and the prestigious halftime show at the Super Bowl, as it did for The Rolling Stones, however, that is beside the point. The everyday creativity terminology is not descriptive of what is out there, of what people did and do on YouTube, not even in those cases for which authors suggest – as they usually do – that lines have become blurred. It should be added that neither Amiee Jacobsen’s story nor the story of The Rolling Stones, as told by Keith Richards, shows analogies with the discovery-of-talent narrative that is so popular in the press and in various contemporary television formats (see Currid-Halkett 208).

Contextualizing YouTube practices

As I pointed out in the review of the YouTube research literature, there are two oppositional framings with regards to the relationship of creative practices on YouTube and practices elsewhere: the industry and the everyday creativity framings. As other parts of this study, the analysis of skills presented in YouTube videos suggests that things were more complex and require a more differentiated conceptualization.

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Historical and contemporary cultural practices were indeed relevant for what vloggers did in 2005 and 2006, not only but also because several were already publicly showing audiovisual and musical works in other contexts. The question of which practices are appropriate to relate YouTube practices to or to differentiate them from needs to be asked on different levels.

As Eggo Müller points out, conceptions like “authorship, craftsmanship,” and “medium specificity” (“Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video” 135, 132) prevailed on YouTube. Below that one could ask for the nature of the respective craft and of the medium in question. Overall parameters of audiovisual quality like lighting and sound quality also mattered (129). Nevertheless, I have already pointed out that the YouTube tutorials on the vlogs of the corpus did not call for ever more improvement towards professional standards but that they formulated quality levels of what was considered ‘good’ YouTube quality (p. 98).

Below this very general level, things become more complex and require a differentiated analysis. With regards to the respective micro-practice on YouTube, different contexts offer similarities and differences. Lip syncing on video blogs depended on audiovisual media’s fundamental property of having an image and a sound track which could be worked on independently. It also depended on knowledge of industry forms of lip syncing. Nevertheless, there were structural differences between industry forms and lip syncing on video blogs which justify to regard it as a distinct skill and micro-practice with distinct parameters of achievement. Neither the everyday nor the mainstream conventions argument is explanatory.

Musical performances on video blogs can be seen in the context of other public performances of popular music that are audiovisually recorded, distributed, and shown. Neither the everyday nor the professional framing is helpful to make sense of them. For musicians YouTube was probably another medium for what they were doing anyway. The musical performance in videos on vlogs thus does not seem to be structurally distinct. That notwithstanding, the overwhelming praise for Amiee Jacobsen’s performances suggests a standard of a good musical performance that was probably not as ‘high’ as that of the entertainment industry. The standard would be comparable to that of public performances in local small-scale venues.

4.4 The Representation of Accidents

Like performing self and other, the presentation of skills and the representation of accidents belong together because the presentation of a skill could, in case of failure, lead to an accident that had to be responded to in one way or another. More generally, because quality mattered in video blogging, the ways vloggers dealt with accidents which happened during their profilmic presentation can be a particularly interesting object of analysis.

Schneider's fourth mode of performance "unwillkürliche Darstellung," i.e. 'unintended' or 'unintentional representation,' refers to the absence or loss of control of a performer over her or his performance (174). 'Unintended' and 'unintentional presentation' sound unwieldy. These terms also beg the question what exactly vloggers were still presenting in profilmic space once their intended presentation had failed. One could argue that failure of the intended presentation was precisely the moment when the profilmic presentation in general collapsed.

Because of these problems, I use 'the representation of accidents' to refer to a fourth mode of performance instead. Building on the colloquial use of 'accident' for "something that happens without anyone planning or intending it" (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*), an unforeseen event by vloggers' own or some other agency's making which happened during the profilmic presentation is regarded as an accident. An accident interrupted the expected or intended course of events and possibly precluded the intended outcome of the overall presentation.

As a result of the personal union of performing, producing, and uploading on regular vlogs (and the vlog-within-the-frame on unacknowledged fictional vlogs), we can assume that everything uploaded to a regular video blog was shown with the approval of the performer. Cases in which people seem to have been filmed without consent are rare and only show sidekicks. Would a vlogger have shown a moment during which he or she seriously lost control in a public YouTube video (cf. Schneider 174)? Accordingly, in the context of dealing with accidents, the issue of showing or not showing footage is pertinent. If we encounter accidents in videos on regular vlogs, they were presented to us by grace of the person involved and in many cases responsible for the accidents, probably presented as accidents. Unlike in the case of the presentation of skills, adding a 're' to 'presentation' is

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necessary: 'Representation' signifies the act after the fact, and accounts for the editorial agency of the performer.

Do the accidents themselves or their representation in videos constitute a mode of performance? In this chapter 'performing' is used in a very general sense of presenting to implied or real viewers (see Carlson 5) – not just to refer to the profilmic activities of vloggers. The accidents themselves and vloggers' reactions in profilmic space, in postproduction, and in the decision to show the footage in a public YouTube video will be in view. Reflexive remarks about the self-censorship of footage showing accidents will be relevant as well.

I will focus on the self-censorship and representation of pauses and fillers that happened while vloggers spoke, on vloggers' reactions to interventions from others, and on blooper videos in which footage of accidents was recycled.

Pauses and fillers

Because vloggers' voices were crucial tools of corporeal delivery, it is no surprise that speech disfluencies were a major field of accidents that happened during their profilmic presentation. Speech disfluencies comprise phenomena such as "silent" and "filled pauses, prolongations, repetitions, substitutions, deletions," and "insertions" (Moniz, Trancoso, and Mata 17–19).

There is a meta-discourse about how to deal with certain kinds of disfluencies in YouTube videos themselves. Besides giving tips about how to improve lighting and sound quality, Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) also offers some thoughts about how to deal with silent and filled pauses (e.g. 'ums' and 'uhs') in his second YouTube tutorial:

If you are one of those people who tends to say 'um' a lot or pause when you're trying to think of what to say next, edit those out. Some of the best videos on here are from people who edit out those boring little pauses. [...] That's why my videos have so many cuts in them, because when I talk, I tend to pause every now and again, but nobody wants to watch that on YouTube. (*More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*)

Another strategy would be to avoid making pauses and fillers during the profilmic presentation for the next video. In *Telling it all part 1* Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) recognizes the high number of fillers in his

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performance: “There are a lot more ums to come.” In future videos he did not delete fillers and pauses, but their number significantly decreased anyway because he seems to have improved his skills of spoken presentation (e.g. *Telling it all* 34).

Normative videos like BLUNTY3000’s tutorial, reflexive statements made during the profilmic presentation, and vloggers’ dealing with silent and filled pauses indicate that such events were in fact regarded as accidents in the practice. This problematization of disfluencies evidences that video blogging needs to be situated in the context of public cultural practices. In public speeches and in television news-casts, only to name two obvious examples, such events are also regarded as problematic. In everyday conversation, by contrast, they are a lot more accepted, especially because they do not necessarily impede communicative success (see Moniz et. al). Burr seems to acknowledge the difference between cultural production for public distribution/exhibition and everyday conversation: Whereas “nobody wants to watch that on YouTube. It’s fine when you’re talking in person to someone because you’ve got an actual conversation going.” Vloggers’ reflection and action in this regard further support my argument about videos on vlogs as public cultural artifacts – and about the inappropriateness of conceiving of vlogs in terms of everyday creativity and “interpersonal” conversation (cf. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 13 and 38; 54).

Nate Burr and Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) typically dealt with pauses and fillers by deleting them. Obviously, jump cuts were the result of deleting short sections from a take. In the editing chapter I argue that this strategy led to and was recognized as a distinct mode of editing within video blogging from early summer 2006 on (p. 241). Peter Oakley, by contrast, improved his presentation skills and hardly used the “editing things out” strategy. To a certain extent, then, these strategies served for stylistic differentiation between vloggers.

It also seems that the choice of strategy and the amount of speech mistakes that were deleted or preserved depended on the respective video project. It is no surprise that there are virtually no ‘ums’ left in *How to make better videos*, a tutorial in which deleting ‘ums’ is a topic. The video ended up having over a hundred jump cuts. At the beginning of *Being Groped*, a subject clip released about a month later which deals with the vlogger’s insomnia, Burr leaves a couple of ‘ums’ and lengthy pauses in the video to illustrate his “very short attention span” at the time of shooting the footage. Representing these particular ‘ums’ and ‘pauses’ was thus motivated by the video’s topic.

4.4 The Representation of Accidents

Like in the cases of the improvement of lighting and sound quality, it seems that professional standards were not what vloggers aimed for but a quality level of the presentation that was deemed 'good' within the context of the practice video blogging itself: a negotiated level of quality. Interestingly, this mix of "editing" some speech disfluencies "out" and representing a few was also used in the fictional situation of production emulated on LONELYGIRL15, for example in the video *School Work in Summer*. The producers behind the project appear to have recognized that neither 'pure' amateurism and a casual conversation style nor professional flawlessness were characteristic of the practice, but a negotiated level of quality in which not all pauses and fillers were deleted.

Interventions

While speech disfluencies were vloggers' own fault, other accidents happened during the profilmic presentation that were not of their own but of others' making, but that were also caught by the camera and asking for a reaction during shooting and in postproduction. What interventions from others were out there and how did vloggers deal with them?

Unreliable participants like children and animals were intervening agents in video blogging (see also Schneider 193). In BOWIECHICK's *Niece and nameless paper girl* Oliveria is playing with her niece when the niece breaks wind. It is not possible to hear anything in the video except for the vlogger's reaction: "I think she just farted. And now she's laughing because she farted. I can smell it. It's rather gross. I think I wanna open the window." Oliveria's dialogue raises awareness of the event instead of ignoring or concealing it. Self-reflexively she expresses her attitude with regards to the event to implied viewers. Obviously, in postproduction the footage of the event was not discarded. By contrast, we see a shot that begins with the event and ends with what seems to be the end of her reaction. Editing was thus not used to censor but to faithfully represent the event and to constitute it as an element of the video's overall content and form.

At the beginning of *Im special* Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) reads out the ingredients of a shampoo bottle in an excited manner. Her dog feels addressed, enters the frame and tries to lick her face. Brodack is only minimally deterred. She continues her presentation and pushes the dog away several times (Fig. 4.4.1). In the second half of the video

4.4 The Representation of Accidents

the dog turns around his own axis behind her trying to catch his tail (Fig. 4.4.2). The dog becomes an active presence of the profilmic event, contributing 'content.' Brodack accounted for this by showing instead of discarding the footage and by not trimming the end of the take which shows the dog after she herself has departed to turn off the camera. Brodack thus consciously integrated the dog as a sidekick into the video. Through applying a fast motion effect in postproduction, the comic effect of her own and the dog's activities are emphasized. The majority of comments the video attracted, in fact, refer to the dog's actions – not to Brooke's.



4.4.1-2 Brooke Brodack and an accidental sidekick in *Im special*.

While the niece and the dog were already in the same room and merely acted in an unforeseen way, in other videos an agency from outside intervened during shooting. In *A Day in the Life of Smosh* Padilla records Hecox fooling around in the former's bedroom. At some point Padilla's mother knocks at the door, receives permission to enter, and asks the boys to be quiet because she wants to sleep. The boys apologize and the mother leaves. Hecox laughs into the camera and goes on as before. Padilla turns the camera on himself and says in a faux-winy voice that he got scolded by his mother. Still, he reminds his friend to keep quiet later in the video. The vloggers do not abort their presentation or stop the camera but reflect on the event. Event and reaction are represented to a public audience with the upload of the finished video. Different stages of production thus affirm and integrate the event into a video publicly shown on YouTube.

Who are you....Who, Who...Who, Who is a subject clip in which Paul Robinett talks about YouTube and which is shot in his garden. When a

4.4 The Representation of Accidents

plane flies over the lot, the vlogger switches from a register of sincere self performance to the over-the-top persona of a preacher. He switches back to the previous register when the plane is gone and comments on the insert: “That was some filler⁶⁸ because of the plane.” Like many of his other subject clips, *Who are you* is a one-shot clip. Arguably, having a video without cuts in mind (see also 5.2 Editing, p. 234), he had to react to the noisy intervention in a manner that bridged some time while still offering content – a comic presentation – to his viewers.

In all of these cases vloggers pretty much remained in control when the interventions happened. Moreover, while each of these interventions briefly interrupted the intended course of the presentation, all of them remained within the semantic and logic of the world that was meant to be presented: All of these events ‘could happen’ in the domestic or other worlds that were meant to be shown. If teenagers or young adults who are still living with their parents are shooting a video about themselves goofing around in their room, there is the possibility of parental interference. If a video is shot in a garden in contemporary America – and does not aim to recreate Victorian England or the Wild West – there is the possibility of a plane flying over the set. The fact that neither of these events marred the coherence of the world presented but, by contrast, affirmed and authenticated that world, was probably relevant for the decision to show the event/s in the eventual video.

Apart from that, in all of these videos vloggers managed to react in a manner that used the event for the creation of a comic effect. Oliveria and Padilla exaggerated their distress over the events in their reactions and seem to be asking for schadenfreude on the side of viewers at their own expenses. The dog’s activities themselves were comic in a way; and Robinett used the plane for a self-contained comic presentation.

Blooper videos

Another way of dealing with accidents caught by the camera was to recontextualize them in a blooper video (see Willett, “Parodic Prac-

⁶⁸ Obviously, the vlogger does not mean an ‘um’ or ‘uh’ when he uses the word “filler” here but an activity to ‘fill’ the disturbance caused by the plane.

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tices” 126). Such a video typically bears ‘bloopers,’ ‘out-takes,’ or ‘discarded takes’ in its title, but it does not really consist of discarded takes: The shots of such a video were created from discarded takes of the production of individual or various videos and additively edited. Typically, each shot is only long enough to show some of the regular presentation, the accident, and the vlogger’s reaction.

Pedro Morbeck released two such videos during the time of interest. *Video Outtakes* shows material from the production of several previously-released videos (see also *Deleted scenes from sex talk with Belatrix*). It is relevant for the way his profilmic reaction and the recontextualization of the material turned out that Morbeck enacted fictional characters for his videos and wrote lines for himself to present (Morbeck in *To the fans and haters*). The dramaturgy of each shot typically moves from enacting a character ‘correctly,’ to being unable to present a line, breaking character, and the reaction of Morbeck as Morbeck to the accident. A discarded take from the production of *The Cat fight* shows him attempting to present a line that Chipmunk Chick directs to her assistant Alicia: “Alright, that’s it. I’m gonna tear that greasy hair off your motherfucking piece of shit.” A slip of the tongue makes him abort the enactment: “Alright, that’s it. I wanna scare....” He breaks character, looks down at the script (Fig. 4.4.3), and angrily looks at the camera or implied viewers only a split second later (Fig. 4.4.4).



4.4.3-4 Morbeck’s two-stage reaction to failing to present a Chipmunk Chick line correctly (*Video Outtakes*).

Unlike in the cases of the interventions discussed above, it seems that the event destroyed the coherence of the world which was meant to be presented. To stay in character and simply present the mistake

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as a mistake of Chipmunk Chick by having ‘her’ repeat the line would not have been consistent because she was in a rage and would not plausibly repeat her threat. Such repair strategies are common in everyday communication, but obviously this accident led to the breakdown of a profilmic presentation during the production of *The Cat fight*.

Unlike a pause or filler, this slip of the tongue was a speech disfluency that could not have been edited out because dialogue would have been missing. This material could only be used and released within the format of the blooper video.

An accident or a failed presentation became a success within the conventions of this kind of video. Because vloggers created videos from waste material (i.e. because they recycled material) one way of making sense of blooper videos would be the scarcity of video objects that characterized early YouTube videomaking.

In recent years, SMOSH have strategically been using blooper videos to draw people from YouTube to their own smosh.com website where they do not have to share advertising revenues with YouTube. The sketch comedy videos on their SMOSH channel carry video descriptions with hyperlinks like the following: “BLOOPERS & DELETED SCENES: <http://smosh.com/videos/movies-extras>” (*Smosh: If Movies Were Real*). Like the accident from the production of Morbeck’s *The Cat fight* – and unlike the accident from the production of their own self/world documentary *A Day in the Life of Smosh* – most accidents that happened during the production of their sketch comedy videos could not have been used in the videos for which the footage had been created.

It is safe to assume that the vast majority of takes that did not end up in the videos for which they were originally intended did not end up in a blooper video either. Probably, only those mistakes and failures that were deemed capable of creating a comic effect were recycled. The comic effects can alternatively be explained in terms of the superiority and incongruity theories of humor (Morreall). Interestingly, the vlogger as a producer and distributor is poking fun at the vlogger as a performer in blooper videos.

Of course blooper videos occupy a position in a longer history of related film and television conventions and formats. Many DVD releases of contemporary movies and television series contain a collection of such comic discarded takes as extras. Speech disfluencies and other accidents from television live news broadcasting are collected by the networks themselves (to be shown at the end of the year or at other special occasions) and by viewers.

Accidents in conclusion

In this chapter I did not deal with accidents that were created for comic effect in the first place. In SMOSH's *How Not to Make a First Impression* the teenage character makes one mistake after the other when meeting his date's father for the first time. 'Accidentally,' for example, a bunch of condoms fall out of his pocket. The father obviously does not like the idea of the young man sleeping with his daughter: "Boy, what are you planning to do with these?" Constructing accidents is a very common device in all sorts of comedy formats, largely aiming at schadenfreude. These types of accidents are common in YouTube videos but they do not fall under the fourth mode of performance in the taxonomy used here (and neither would they in Müller's nor Schneider's for that matter). The profilmic accidents in view in this chapter were not motivated by the video project when they occurred. A hypothetical accident during the production of *How Not to Make a First Impression* would be if the condoms got stuck in Ian Hecox's pocket and did not fall out. Such an event could then be recontextualized in a blooper video of course.

Scarcities of experience (in the cases of some vloggers), of time, and limits of the equipment appear to have been the main reasons for the large numbers of accidents that happened during the shooting stage of vloggers' video production. Speech disfluencies were by far the most-common kinds of accidents – both shown and censored. While accidents were regarded as problematic in the practice video blogging, many of them were shown anyway or recontextualized through an appropriate reaction during the profilmic presentation or in the context of blooper videos because of the scarcity of video objects. Nevertheless, material in which something seriously went wrong and in which a vlogger seriously lost control was probably neither shown in the 'actual' video nor in a blooper video. The nature of the very video project in question seems to have been decisive for the ways a vlogger reacted during shooting and how he or she decided over the material. This again suggests that vloggers knew what they were doing: that they were pursuing specific video projects and knew which material and devices would work for that project.

Conclusion: The Body and Performance in Video Blogging

Chapters 3 and 4 accounted for the importance of corporeal delivery in video blogging and the various functions fulfilled by the body in the audiovisual practice. In videos on vlogs we encounter vloggers' bodies as productive and versatile tools for the creation of audiovisual artifacts: Vloggers speak, dance, sing, play instruments, lip sync, gesture, jump and move about, enact selves and others, and execute production tasks on camera. The performances we encounter on video blogs from 2005 and 2006 came about as the distinct interactions of the vlogger's body in a setting with occasional co-performers, a video object, the camera, implied viewers, and further entities. On unacknowledged fictional blogs this configuration was emulated.

A lot of attention was devoted to the interplay between performing self and other, and a little less to that between the presentation of skills and the representation of failure. The focus on the former couplet was justified because vloggers were very creative here and also because this creativity and the dynamics between these modes were not accounted for thus far. Nevertheless, all four modes of performance did in fact depend on each other and were in interplay in the practice. Morbeck's *The Cat fight* and *Video Outtakes* are cases in point. Pedro Morbeck enacts Chipmunk Chick and Alicia in most of the material we see in *The Cat fight*. He presents his skills of enacting female characters, of costume and makeup design, and of editing at the same time (Figs. 2.1.13-14). In other material he enacts a version of himself as a videomaker troubled by his characters (Fig. 2.1.15). In the material we see in *Video Outtakes* he starts out enacting Chipmunk Chick until an accident happens. He breaks character and enacts a self-conscious self (Fig. 4.4.3-4). The representation of that accident involves his profilmic reaction and the recontextualization of the footage in the blooper video.

Performance and narrative are sometimes opposed in conceptualizations of YouTube videos, and the former is equated with mere spectacle while the latter is said to contribute to the creation or communication of information, even to the revelation of truth. Writing about two popular musical performance videos, Jean Burgess observes: "Notably, like many of the most popular YouTube videos of all time, they are both performance-based and music-related, rather than nar-

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rative or information-based” (103). In their study of popular videos on YouTube, Landry and Guzdial “examine whether end-user video creators on YouTube use plot-based storytelling as a communication strategy” (1). They find that “the majority” of videos “showcase everyday people engaging in uncommon activities. Furthermore, a small minority of popular videos actually tells a story.” The alleged absence of narrative videos prompts them to assert the cultural inferiority of YouTube videomaking: “Based on our findings, we propose the composition gap as a means of conceptualizing the disparity between video content on YouTube and professional content” (1). The composition gap could be decreased through “technologies” that not only support users in terms of “technical skill” but also in terms of “vision.” Obviously, YouTube videomaking is not regarded as a creative practice in its own right but entirely with reference to a pretty limited idea of “professional content.”

An interview “the Wall Street Journal solicited” with “George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars regarding Internet video” is an important element in their argument:

[Lucas] equates circus to voyeurism and suggests “you don’t have to write anything, you don’t have to do anything, you just sort of watch it happen and it’s interesting.” In contrast, he considers art to require the telling of a story and “hopefully that story reveals the truth behind the facts” (1-2). Lucas places the state of Internet video, particularly the content on YouTube, in the former category. If Lucas is correct, storytelling is not taking place on YouTube despite the role storytelling plays in our culture as a foundation of communication across place and time. From a cursory glance it seems that George Lucas is correct [...]. (1-2)

Lucas’ distinction between art and circus is also used in the title of their article: “Art or Circus? Characterizing User-Created Video on YouTube.” The distinction between art and storytelling on the one side and circus and performance on the other is too outlandish to seriously engage with. One wonders though on which side Lucas and Landry/Guzdial would place instrumental music, sculpture, and painting, all of which are non-narrative in most cases.

It is more important to emphasize that the performing body was employed for the creation of all sorts of videos in video blogging: The

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narrating performers of public diary clips (see p. 103) and Peter Oakley in his “video autobiography” on GERIATRIC1927 (Sørenssen 149) used their bodies for the creation of narrative videos. The body was also employed for the creation of narrative in the sketch comedy clips on SMOSH and other channels. The body presented ‘information’ in subject clips like the tutorials on BLUNTY3000. It presented skills of various kinds: YouTube-specific skills like lip sync and skills of the general cultural realm like musical performance. Apart from that, unruly bodies themselves were explored in the practice.

Moreover, apart from the creation of ‘content’ understood as synonymous with ‘videos,’ the body also created content in terms of the unwieldy opposition of content and form. This content creation happened through the very performance of the body. Public diary clips and subject clips – videos in which the speaking body was crucial – are probably the best examples of this. Nevertheless, we should not fall into the trap of understanding content only in terms of a limited notion of content as “information” (cf. Burgess 103). Audiovisual artifacts – including home dance or lip sync videos – ‘have’ content even if they are not narrative or transmitting information.

Of course different kinds and different degrees of artistry were involved in these different kinds of performances – be it in a self-consciously entertaining rant about popularity with girls on YouTube (THEWINEKONE, *Internet Recognition*), a sketch about a young man’s first meeting with his girlfriend’s parents (SMOSH, *How not to Make a First Impression*), or in a musical or lip sync performance video. And of course if institutions and honoraries of the art world would confer the “status of candidate for appreciation” on a YouTube video, it could become a ‘proper’ “artwork” (Dickie 101). Nevertheless, the discursive limits of ‘art’ which manifest themselves in the interview solicited with George Lucas should not prevent us from studying and appreciating the body as a productive and creative tool in the cultural and audiovisual practice video blogging.

Because videos on vlogs are recordings of corporeal activities and not the activities themselves, audiovisual delivery matters even in videos in which corporeal delivery predominates. In chapter 5 the use of audiovisual techniques will be explored. The creation of an overall form will be studied in chapter 6. Here again, the function of the body not only for the creation of content but also of form will be acknowledged.

5 The Use of Audiovisual Techniques

Regarding YouTube videos as audiovisual artifacts and studying them as such is marginal in the YouTube research thus far (see chapter 1.1). I already demonstrated that from early on in the history of the platform, showing the videos one had created (or was about to create) was a motivation of users with and without a background in related areas (chapter 2.1). In the chapter “Stages of Production” (2.4) I illustrated how vloggers understood audiovisual production as a process in which different techniques and tasks related to and depended on each other. Indeed, video blogging on YouTube emerged as an audiovisual practice. In this chapter the use of audiovisual techniques by vloggers and by the creators of unacknowledged fictional vlogs will be in view. Foci are on form and function of the pivotal techniques cinematography (5.1) and editing (5.2).

5.1 Cinematography

The camera transformed performers and settings in specific manners that provided the footage that eventually – with or without postproduction – ended up in the videos we watch on YouTube. These “cinematographic qualities” will be in view now (Bordwell and Thompson 229).

Taking a BROOKERS video uploaded in 2005 as a main example, I want to illustrate how specific attributes of camerawork emerged as a result of vloggers’ creative response to the scarcity that conditioned YouTube video production. From spring 2006 on, this cinematography was adopted by several channels for which scarcity was not necessarily pressing. For LONELYGIRL15 and other channels of this second group, authentication of constructed vlogs as regular vlogs and, beyond that, of an ‘amateur’ mode of production and ‘authentic’ vlogger characters was the pressing issue.

While these channels – especially their ultimate failure of passing as regular video blogs – have been the focus of some research already (Christian; Flemming; Kuhn), the adopted cinematography itself and its contexts of emergence as well as the creative labor of the vloggers who developed it have not received attention thus far. Moreover, it is assumed that the adapted and the adaptation did not differ in terms of form and function when Markus Kuhn, for example, writes of the con-

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ventions of video blogs which indicated authenticity and a non-commercial origin (“Authentizität und Nicht-Kommerzialität”), that were – because of their very conventionality – functionalized in seemingly ‘authentic’ vlogs like LONELYGIRL15 (“Medienreflexives filmisches Erzählen im Internet” 30). Notably, regular vlogs are not part of Kuhn’s research. Some videos on regular video blogs may have an ‘authentic’ aura, but that does not mean that they were intended to have such an aura or that the function of their cinematography can be limited to producing this arguably circumstantial aura. As I am going to show, there are videos with a conspicuously ‘inauthentic’ aura that still employ a specific set of devices that all respond to the condition of scarcity.

The cinematography of scarcity

I suggest that the way profilmic space was transformed into images in video blogging very much depended on the number of people involved in the production. There was a scarcity of personnel, which was why some vloggers asked friends and family members for support, and why participants always doubled up as performers and as people fulfilling production tasks (see 2.2 Three Arguments about Video Production, p. 91). The number of participants conditioned the possibilities for static and mobile framing and lead to a specific cinematography. More generally, scarcity made vloggers work efficiently. The cinematography of scarcity was not limited to specific kinds of videos but characterized camerawork on regular video blogs in general.

The BROOKERS video *Butterfly* is a music video for a song by the eurodance act Smile.dk and was uploaded on October 7, 2005. It consists of footage produced with one, two, and three participants involved. It seems that Brooke Brodack added participants and produced footage until she figured there was enough for the video. The order of shots in the video does not seem to resemble their production history since footage with the same setting, performers, and costume appears in different parts of the video.

In a couple of handheld shots we see the **vlogger on her own**. Brooke **operated the camera during the profilmic presentation from onscreen**. There is no indication of another person’s presence. Handholding is obviously a form of **mobile framing**, and Brooke exploited the camera’s mobility to create a shot of herself upside down by rotating the camera by 180° (Fig. 5.1.1). For handheld selfshots the

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range of possible camera distances was limited. With Brooke's camera and arm length, only close-ups could be realized. The vlogger's own mobility and possibilities for activities were limited because one hand was busy with the camera.



5.1.1 A mobile shot which shows Brooke – upside down, wearing a funny cap – which was created by herself handholding the camera.

The vlogger is dancing **in front of a static camera** in other shots of *Butterfly*. She probably simply put the camera on a flat surface, possibly a bookshelf, before starting to perform. A range of camera distances was possible in this set-up, and the vlogger remained mobile because she did not have to operate the camera while performing (Fig. 5.1.2-3).



5.1.2-3 Brooke dancing in static medium close-up and medium shots in *Butterfly*.

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An additional advantage of the static mode was that it enabled single vloggers to produce narrative videos in which an enacted figure was unaware of the camera. In *...And Smell The Coffee*, for example, Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) enacted a 'version' of himself waking up in the morning (Fig. 5.1.4). Being asleep and waking up while handholding a camera all the while would have been inconsistent in terms of the video's diegetic world. Because Huynh was working on his own, the framing could thus only be static. As a producer/performer, Huynh positioned the camera on a flat surface or tripod, pressed the record button, and then positioned himself on the bed to start performing. During postproduction he trimmed the footage of himself lying down: We only see him asleep and waking up in the shot he created from the footage. The other shots of the video are also static and were probably produced in an analog manner (e.g. Fig. 5.1.5). The diegetic Tony Huynh is unaware of the camera throughout.



5.1.4-5 Frames from two successive static shots from THEWINEKONE's *...And Smell The Coffee*: Tony Huynh wakes up and puts away a comic book that he had fallen asleep on.

A static shot of a single vlogger is by far the most common type of shot on the regular video blogs of the corpus. Several single vloggers, like MORBECK, THEWINEKONE, BLUNTY3000, and GERIATRIC1927 almost entirely relied on such shots. When vloggers used mobile framings, it seems to have been for a reason. For MORBECK's *Behind the scenes look* the vlogger used a handheld mobile camera to successively pick out various items of inventory in his apartment (Figs. 5.2.15-17). The only mobile shots in THEWINEKONE's *Internet Recognition* are shots of a computer screen playing videos by other vloggers; the reason for this

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framing could be a missing surface in the right distance to the screen to put the camera to rest. Obviously, in the above-mentioned shot from *Butterfly* (Fig. 5.1.1), Brooke rotated the camera to create visual variety. When there was an individual object of interest, such as one's own body, and expansive movement through space was not necessary, and when a surface to put the camera to rest was close by, single vloggers used a static framing. Static framing was nearly universal in public diary clips, subject clips, and lip sync music videos; it was also common in other kinds of videos.

In another mobile shot in *Butterfly*, Brooke is not operating the camera herself. Her sister Melissa seems to be operating the camera; we can hear her offscreen laughter. If a **vlogger was working with a partner, mobile framings of one of them** with a broad range of camera distances were possible. This participant's mobility was not restricted because she did not need to operate the camera while performing. This particular shot would not have been possible as a self-shot because Brooke was performing inside a cardboard box and thus could not use her hands (Fig. 5.1.6).



5.1.6 Mobile shot of Brooke in a cardboard box, probably operated by Melissa.

In videos on regular video blogs there is no evidence of offscreen-only participants: evidence of someone who is operating the camera but who cannot be seen anywhere in the video. I suggest that as a result of the scarcity of both offscreen and onscreen personnel, all participants had to double up as people fulfilling production tasks, for example as camera operators, and as performers. Also, vloggers wanted to present themselves with their friends – and these friends

5.1 Cinematography

wanted to be seen with the vloggers (see also Willett, “Consumption, Production, and Online Identities” 65). Melissa can thus be seen in other parts of the video (see below). In RENETTO’s *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment* the vlogger’s friend Dave participated mostly to operate the camera. Because Paul Robinett’s activities for conducting the experiment were expansive, he needed mobile framing to shoot the footage. Operating the camera himself was not an option because he required both hands when throwing himself to the ground towards the end of the video: He needed a partner (Figs. 2.4.5-8). However, Dave also turned the camera at himself to say hello and, more importantly, to say that he thought the experiment would fail, which provided a contrast with the vlogger’s own optimism (Fig. 2.4.6). Thus Dave contributed as a camera person and as a performer providing content. Introducing him can thus be conceived of as a response to the scarcity of personnel and contents.

In *Butterfly Brooke and Melissa* are **both onscreen in a static shot** in which they enact a situation in which Brooke convinces Melissa to participate in the creation of the video (Fig. 5.1.7). Because of the small distance between camera and performer in a selfshot, mobile framings of two participants were not very convenient. If both performers wanted to or had to be onscreen together, static framings tended to be used. While Melissa, the second participant, provided more cinematographic options for shots of only one of them, a new limit was reached in shots of both of them: Mobile framings were no longer practicable.



5.1.7 Static shot from *Butterfly*: Brooke ‘convinces’ Melissa to participate.

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An efficient coordination of performance, cinematography, and editing allowed for pretty varied audiovisual delivery – taking into account that only two people were involved – when the mobile and the static two-participant configurations were combined. A static shot in the narrative first segment of SMOSH's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* shows Anthony and Ian in front of a sewage pipe into which the CD they were playing with has flown into; Ian enters to retrieve it (Fig. 5.2.25). The shot ends as soon as Ian is out of sight. The following mobile shot shows Anthony next to the pipe wondering why his friend is not coming back (Fig. 5.2.26). The camera, obviously operated by Ian, pans back and forth between Anthony and the pipe. Anthony calls his friend's name into the pipe and eventually follows him inside (Fig. 5.2.28). In this shot Ian is offscreen and can thus operate the camera while his diegetic presence is implied by his walk into the pipe in the preceding shot. In terms of efficiency and variety, SMOSH were the vloggers that got the most out of the two-participant variant of the cinematography of scarcity in the corpus (e.g. also *How Not to Make a First Impression*).

Brooke shot most of the footage for her video with the help not only of Melissa but also of her friend Ben. Several **mobile shots** show **two performers** on a playground while **the third is offscreen operating the camera**. In some of these shots Ben and Melissa are onscreen, in others Ben and Brooke, or Brooke and Melissa. A shot of Melissa and Ben sliding illustrates the advantages of the third participant: After Melissa has slid, Brooke reframes her with a pan left to catch some of her run to the slide's stairs. Then she pans right to show Ben sliding (Figs. 5.1.8-10).



5.1.8-10 Mobile shot in *Butterfly*: Melissa and Ben slide; Brooke operates the camera panning left and right.

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In **shots of all three participants** there was again no one ‘left’ to operate the camera, so the framing had to be **static**. In a shot of the teenagers mock-playing instruments the missing camera operator may strike us as a problem – or at least as an indication of another limit being reached – since the framing of this shot is not correct. During shooting, this went unnoticed for a while: The trio performed while they were only partially in view. Brooke even completely left the frame to the right at some point. When Melissa noticed the wrong framing, she terminated her presentation and disappointedly looked at the camera (Fig. 5.1.12). Either because she did not have enough footage or because she did not care, Brooke did not discard the footage of this accident when editing the video.



5.1.11-12 Static shot with incorrect framing because a camera operator was ‘missing.’

Apart from editing, movement in profilmic space and a mobile frame (achieved through camera movement or zooming) are principal ways of creating visual variety in audiovisual artifacts. Vloggers employed tactics of both kinds in their videos.

GAYGOD’s *Dreamstreet SUGAR RUSH* is a one-shot home dance music video that has mobile framing in some parts and static framing in others. In the mobile parts the vlogger’s friend pans between herself and the vlogger. In the static parts both of them leave and enter the frame, excessively moving their bodies, and also change camera distance by coming closer to the camera or moving away.

Changing camera distance through profilmic movement is a common tactic of vloggers in static shots, as a shot of Brooke, Melissa, and Ben from *Butterfly* illustrates (Fig. 5.1.13-14). This tactic can be found

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in videos with different numbers of participants in shots which are static because all participants are onscreen. It stands in for mobile framing to the extent that it also alters the proportion of the body and the frame. Unlike camera movement or zooming, however, the distance between camera and overall setting remains the same (Bordwell and Thompson 241, 263, 271-272).

If their cameras allowed for a variation of focal length, some vloggers zoomed to get a 'closer' view of a person or object. If a participant was meant to be in view, this, of course, required a second participant who operated the camera (Figs. 5.1.15-16). Overall, zooming was not particularly common.



5.1.13-14 Camera distance changed through profilmic movement in a shot from *Butterfly*.



5.1.15-16 Ian runs off. Anthony, operating the camera follows him but at some point zooms in instead (*The California Stereotype Experiment*).

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Scarcity of personnel lead to a cinematography in which, depending on the number of participants, only specific static and mobile shots and combinations of such shots were possible. *Butterfly* shows how a vlogger 'hired' additional personnel to diversify content and expand the creative options for her performance and the transformation of profilmic space into shots. As soon as a second participant was present, this participant could operate the camera and allowed the vlogger to perform more freely. Each addition seemed to imply another limit: There were shots in which a camera operator was 'missing' even after a new participant had joined. Some vloggers, like THEWINEKONE and SMOSH, managed to get by without adding additional participants during the time of interest. They did so by efficiently employing the limited options of the cinematography of scarcity. Viewers' increasing association of a vlog with specific participants (e.g. THEWINEKONE → only Tony Huynh, SMOSH → Anthony Padilla and Ian Hecox) also seems to have played an important role here (see also p. 397).

Bordwell and Thompson refer to filmmaking in which one person or a small collective executes all production and performance tasks as "small-scale cinema." Scarcity of personnel is constitutive for this mode of production, for cinematography and other tasks (38). The examples of small-scale cinema the authors quote, however, range from the experimental filmmaking of Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren to the documentaries of Jean Rouch and thus do not really constitute a coherent tradition not to mention a specific cinematography but a general mode of production for which little division of labor is characteristic. Moreover, we have no indication that the vloggers from the corpus knew this kind of filmmaking. Similarities with individual films on the level of cinematography would have to be searched for. Thus it would probably be far-fetched to say that video bloggers were working in that tradition. Also, the largely static framing of public diary and subject clips, which depicted a participant sitting on a chair speaking, shows many similarities with newscasts on television which are not situated within small-scale cinema. While attributes of the cinematography of scarcity can be found in other kinds of camerawork, it does not show strong similarities with one in particular. Moreover, it appears that in spite of similarities it still evolved in the context of early YouTube culture itself.

The footage used in Brodack's *Butterfly* suggests that an expansion of personnel actually took place: The shots with the limited devices of the one-participant variant of the cinematography of scarcity are consistent in terms of personnel, costume, and setting, and so are those

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with the two- and three-participant variants. Significantly, however, Brodack did not care about giving a coherent account about how she produced the video, of authenticating her mode of production. The inserted ‘making-of’ sequences would be an easy target for fake hunters and people who enjoy spotting mistakes of coherence and continuity: Melissa’s performance in the hiring shot leaves no doubt that her reservations about participating are a put-on (Fig. 5.1.7). She is wearing a funny cap that can also be seen in other parts of the video already at the beginning of the shot, that is, before – in that shot’s story – she has been convinced to participate. Brooke and her collaborators did not authenticate their mode of production; they offered a loose and inconsistent narration about how they produced or might have produced the video. The narration in THEWINEKONE’s ... *And Smell The Coffee* and SMOSH’s *Turtles Theme* – in which unawareness of the camera is performed – is also conspicuously ‘inauthentic.’ Now let us take a look at YouTube channels on which authentication was a prime concern.

The cinematography of authentication

From the fact that many people took LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST to be regular video blogs, Aymar Jean Christian concludes that “[c]learly, the creators had mimicked the style of YouTube to a fairly accurate degree.” One of them emphasizes that “having the characters film the episodes themselves” was “crucial” to authenticate channels and videos, to make them pass as regular vlogs (Beckett qtd. in Christian). On the level of cinematography the differences were small. Significantly, shots in which all the characters of a video were onscreen were either static or handheld by one of them from onscreen – just like on a regular vlog. On LONELYGIRL15 both the one-participant (e.g. *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*) and the two-participant variants (e.g. *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*) of the cinematography of scarcity were adopted during its unacknowledged period. Cinematography did not raise doubts about these channels and the uploaded videos but the quality of lighting and editing, Bree’s good looks (Christian), and the plausibility of the story and its narration (Flemming). And even these doubts did not lead to the ultimate disclosure of the project: The trio running the project stepped forward only after three viewers had linked Bree’s MySpace account to an IP at the Creative Artists agency (Rushfield and Hoffman, “Mystery Fuels Popularity of Web’s Lonely-

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girl15"). Thus not aesthetic or narrative inconsistencies uncovered LONELYGIRL15 but a technical discovery about the infrastructure of the project.

Authentication and not scarcity was the prime condition of production of 'fake' video blogs. This difference of conditions of production can explain the few differences between the cinematographies of scarcity and authentication.

While personnel was scarce in the video production of regular vlogs, ironically, in the production of the 'fake' vlogs LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST there was a surplus: There were at least three people – the producers of the series– whose work had to be meticulously hidden, who were “not supposed to exist” (Christian). On the level of production, showing all participants like in the BROOKERS and RENETTO videos above was replaced by concealing significant participants. Almost obsessively, the producers attributed their own work to their characters on the profile page and in video descriptions: “My friend Daniel helped me set up this account and he helps me out with the videos (he’s kinda a computer genius)” (channel page); or “Basically Daniel and I got to go hiking yesterday and he edited it into a cool summery video...yeah Summer!” (video description of *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*).

While scarcity of personnel was not so pressing in the 'actual' production of these videos – that is: there were people around who could have operated the camera – it became a part of the fictional world that was created, of the fictional situation of production that was framed by the real situation of production concealed from viewers' eyes. Especially during outdoors activities, a third person to operate the camera seemed to be missing to allow mobile framings of Bree and Daniel together, for example in *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!* The introduction of further characters, like Jonas (JONASTKO) in late 2006, thus made sense not only in terms of content but also to create more options for cinematography, which to some extent echoes Brooke's introduction of Ben. In *Christmas Surprise* Jonas organizes a reunion of Bree and Daniel – who were separated during their flight – and operates the camera to capture the turbulent moment when Daniel enters the room and Bree recognizes him (Figs. 5.1.17). All the while Jonas speaks from offscreen and is also addressed by the other characters 'through' the camera, which makes the camerawork diegetic (Fig. 5.1.18).

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5.1.17-18 Jonas operates the camera to capture the reunion of Bree and Daniel. Bree addresses him ‘through’ the camera (DANIELBEAST, *Christmas Surprise*).

Video bloggers only handheld the camera where this was motivated or inevitable; for all other situations they placed the camera on a surface in order to have neither of their hands busy during their profilmic presentation and to avoid a wobbly image. It also deserves note that SMOSH – the most successful vloggers in the corpus – started to use a tripod from very early on to allow static framings in various locations and smooth camera movement.⁶⁹ On the unacknowledged fictional LITTLELOCA, however, we encounter several videos where the handheld framing does not appear to be motivated or inevitable. In *Hi, I'm Little Loca* the vlogging character is indoors and merely talking to the camera; she could have put the camera onto a bookshelf or any other flat surface and position herself in front of it. In *Daniel Responds*, the first video Bree's friend uploaded to his ‘own’ channel DANIELBEAST, similar indoors footage is also handheld (Fig. 5.1.19). The producers of unacknowledged fictional vlogs thus went beyond authenticating the constructed vlogs as regular video blogs. Wobbly handheld framings are stereotypically associated with ‘amateur’ productions and believed to add an “air of authenticity” to the images (Bordwell and Thompson 270). Accordingly, I suggest that the producers also aimed to authenticate an ‘amateur’ mode of production and to create the effect of an

⁶⁹ The tripod can be seen in behind-the-scenes videos like *A Day in the Life of Smosh- LA Edition (Part 2 of 2)*. The smooth mobile framing in *Turtles Theme* suggests that a tripod was used.

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indistinct but emphatic ‘authenticity’ of their videos. Unlike we might have suspected, the analysis suggests that it was not a wobbly hand-held image that characterized the cinematography of regular video blogs but an interplay of static and mobile shots dependent on the number of participants and the absence of mobile framing in shots in which all participants were onscreen and in which none of these participants was operating the camera while performing. Static shots were a lot more common than mobile shots. Conversely, handheld camera work seems to have been characteristic of the cinematography of authentication and unacknowledged fictional vlogs.



5.1.19 Daniel handholds the camera, even though there probably would have been places in the vicinity to put the camera to rest to avoid wobbly framing.

An interplay of performing self and performing an other was characteristic of regular video blogs (see chapters 4.1 and 4.2). Also, vloggers sometimes enacted themselves in situations which were acknowledged as fictional, for example in ... *And Smell the Coffee* and *Turtles Theme* (Figs. 5.1.4-5 and 5.2.20-33). On ‘fake’ video blogs, however, performers never played characters playing characters nor characters playing ‘themselves’ in overtly fictional situations. This explains that the cinematographic and narrative configuration of a diegetic figure who is unaware of the camera (and thus, obviously, does not operate it during the profilmic presentation) was not part of the cinematography of authentication. The performances in the mentioned THEWINEKONE and SMOSH videos were conspicuously ‘inauthentic’ – but then, video bloggers did not strive for singularly ‘authentic’ performances. The pleasures of being authentic and inauthentic were

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replaced by anxious authentication on ‘fake’ video blogs. In this respect, their quest for authentication and ‘authenticity’ made producers of unacknowledged fictional vlogs forgo the creative repertoire of regular vlogs.

For Kuhn the appearance of non-diegetic and the reduction of diegetic camerawork in more recent fictional web series, such as *HOOKINGUP*, signaled a shift towards more traditional narrative techniques (“Medienreflexives filmisches Erzählen im Internet” 37–38). Nevertheless, non-diegetic camera work and diegetic figures who were unaware of the camera – the default in most traditional narrative TV and cinema formats – had been part of video blogging all along. The focus on ‘fake’ video blogs in the research to date (Kuhn, Christian) does not account for the creative work of video bloggers of establishing the cinematography of scarcity. Moreover, by projecting traits of ‘fake’ vlogs backwards onto regular vlogs, the specifics of their cinematography are obscured. Most traits of the cinematography of scarcity were also present in the cinematography of authentication because *LONELYGIRL15* and *LITTLELOCA* were meant to pass as regular vlogs. However, the vlogs-within-the-frame also differed in a few ways because they were meant to authenticate an ‘amateur’ mode of production and singularly ‘authentic’ figures – endeavors that were foreign to regular vlogs.

In the history of film and television, fictional autobiographic works are intriguing but rare. In her historical and structural comparison of the *Ich-Roman* and the *Ich-Film* (i.e. the I-novel and the I-film), Christine N. Brinckmann explains this with the narrative limits that a consistent implementation of the *Ich-Film* implies, like the need for a filmmaker as a protagonist and problems of narrating past events (70–71). Jim McBride’s *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967) seemed to be the only case of such a film in 1988. Myrick and Sánchez’s *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *LONELYGIRL15* are more recent examples.⁷⁰ Already foreseen by Brinckmann in 1988, the proliferation of consumer cameras made the need for a filmmaking protagonist less of a problem (72). The cinematography of authentication on *LONELYGIRL15* has many formal commonalities with the cinematography of *David Holzman’s Diary* and *The Blair Witch Project*. McBride’s film would be an example

⁷⁰ *The Blair Witch Project*, however, does not explain how the footage of two cameras found in the woods was efficiently edited into the movie we see (Kuhn 29).

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of the one- and Myrick and Sánchez's of the three-participant variant. Significantly, in the case of each of these works there were participants in the production who were not shown in the audiovisual material. Significantly also, all camerawork in these works was diegetic, and there was no material in which the status of a performance as fictional was acknowledged in the material itself. However, – these structural analogies aside – culturally, the genealogy of unacknowledged fictional vlogs leads to regular video blogs and not to these disparate films.

Conventionalization

Interestingly, in the first videos that several users uploaded to the platform, the absence of the patterns that have been discussed in this (and in previous chapters) is striking: Arguably, “routine ways of doing things” had not “crystallized” yet (Bordwell, *Poetics* 29) or people were not familiar with them, so they did things otherwise. This point has already been made with reference to THEWINEKONE's and BLUNTY-3000's ‘discovery’ of the domestic setting (p. 138).



5.1.20 Jawed Karim in *Me at the zoo*, the first YouTube video (JAWED).

According to Jawed Karim, one of YouTube's co-founders, *Me at the zoo*, uploaded on April 23, 2005, was the first video on YouTube (Karim). It consists of a single handheld shot and shows Karim in a zoo in front of an elephant compound (Fig. 5.1.20). Karim says: “Alright, so here we are in front of the – um – elephants. The cool thing about these guys is that they have really really really long – um – trunks. And that's that's cool. [Pause] And that's pretty much all there is to say.” Karim neither introduces himself nor specifically addresses YouTube

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viewers, which became conventions of beginning a spoken presentation in a YouTube video (see p. 265). In terms of cinematography, the handheld camera operated by a participant who cannot be seen or heard in the video stands out. I have illustrated how contribution of both offscreen and onscreen labor of participants became a standard of video blogging. Unlike in many videos uploaded about a year later, silent and filled pauses were not deleted in postproduction.⁷¹ Evidently, all of these conventions had been established when Bree of LONELY-GIRL15 had her first appearance on YouTube because they were ready for use in the video production that was simulated on the channel.



5.1.21 *EmoSpace*, the first BROOKERS video, was recorded via a mirror.

Brodack's (BROOKERS) first video *EmoSpace*, uploaded on September 30, 2005, differs from her future videos and those of other vloggers. Unlike in the 'hiring' shot from *Butterfly* analyzed above (Fig. 5.1.7), Brooke and Melissa used a mirror to shoot footage of both of them together (Fig. 5.1.21). They positioned themselves in front of a mirror, handholding the camera which recorded their mirror image.

⁷¹ It needs to be acknowledged that Karim's channel would not 'count' as a video blog in the context of this study because he did not regularly upload videos to the platform (see p. 45). He only uploaded one other video in 2005 and 2006. However, this does not mar the present argument.

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Because the girls needed to stay in front of the mirror, they could not move about in the room as they might have in an ordinary mobile shot. The mirror also doubled the shaking of the camera. This technique combined the disadvantages of static shots (performers needed to stay put in one position) and handheld shots (a shaky image and the need to hold the camera while performing). Additionally, it inverted the left-right orientation of profilmic space so that the brand name of the “Minute Rice” box Brooke held up became illegible. We do not know if Brooke recognized these disadvantages, but it is striking that she used a static framing for shots of Melissa and herself when no third participant was available in *Butterfly*, uploaded only eight days later (Fig. 5.1.7), and in further videos.

The absence of the conventions of the cinema of scarcity (and of other conventions of video blogging) in several users’ first videos suggests that in order for these conventions to emerge something had to happen: Users had to work out ways of efficiently producing audiovisual artifacts under the condition of scarcity. These ways were not out there or self-evident, they were the result of reflection, trial and error, or appropriation; situated within the context of YouTube culture and broader cultural contexts. For the emergence of conventions, moreover, individual efforts were not enough: Choices and routines had to be recognized as useful and adopted by other users and attain the status of a standard or norm.

Today the cinematography of scarcity is still employed by video bloggers whose early YouTube success has not continued, for example by Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) in *I Hate Bra Shopping!*. How did cinematography on regular vlogs change when scarcity stopped being a pressing issue for channels that became sustainably successful?

Production values on SMOSH increased throughout the time of interest and beyond. The coherent and elaborate costume in videos like *Anthony is Mexican*, released in 2009, significantly differs from the improvised costume of earlier videos. Make-up to enhance on-camera looks is also conspicuous to an attentive viewer. Most likely, Hecox and Padilla had hired support to fulfill specific tasks by this time. We cannot say if such support was also used in the department of cinematography because offscreen-only support was not acknowledged; that is, shots in which all performers of a video were onscreen were still static or operated from onscreen. Thus the cinematography of scarcity was also employed independently of its initial context of emer-

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gence: scarcity of personnel. The fact that the cinematography of scarcity was used on successful regular vlogs also beyond the era of scarcity and was adapted on unacknowledged fictional video blogs allows us to see it not as mere individual conventions but as a coherent body of conventions, as a cinematographic style. Eventually, in 2010, SMOSH stopped working according to the cinematography of scarcity: Static shots became rare in their videos, and an offscreen-only camera operator frequently reframed the duo (e.g. *XTREME SLEEPOVER!*, see also ‘Coda: YouTube and Youtube Culture Today,’ p. 396).

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Have you noticed [*cut*] the increasing amount of people [*cut*] who have started to edit their videos [*cut*] like [*cut*] this? [*cut*] I wonder [*cut*] who gave them [*cut*] that idea? (THEWINEKONE, *Congratulations*)

Now that the transformation of profilmic space by the camera has been dealt with, we can approach editing, “the coordination of one shot with the next” (Bordwell and Thompson 294). Like in other audiovisual practices, decisions about editing were made during all stages of production in video blogging, while the final choices, those that determined what viewers would see, were made during postproduction (see chapter 2.4).

It is possible to make sense of editing in video blogging in terms of four different modes. This chapter will be devoted to laying out these four modes of editing – one-shot clip editing, jump cut editing, sequence editing, and illustration editing – and ask for their emergence, form, function, and how they relate to editing in other audiovisual practices.

One-shot clip editing

Several videos have no cuts at all but consist of single shots. Even though, strictly speaking, the absence of editing cannot constitute a mode of editing, these videos are treated here because in the study of film (Bazin 27, 33; Bordwell and Thompson 294) as in the study of YouTube videos (Christian) approaches that avoid cuts are made sense of with reference to those that rely on cuts.

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What will be referred to as illustration editing in the final section of this chapter, can be found in a large number of music videos; a smaller number of music videos are one-shot clips. Creating a music video as a one-shot clip was the easiest possible way of producing a music video: Activities inspired by the music, such as lip syncing and dancing, were recorded while the record was playing in the background on a CD player or computer. The relationship between image and sound track created during shooting was preserved in postproduction, that is, no cuts were made. To improve fidelity, vloggers could have replaced the sound track recorded along with the image track with the audio of the record, but typically they didn't. The home dance and lip sync videos on GAYGOD are one-shot clips, and so is the lip sync video *Cell block Tango* on BROOKERS.

All musical performance videos are also one-shot clips, for example on THAUMATA and TERRANAOMI, because vloggers did not use multiple cameras to simultaneously shoot different views of themselves performing. By contrast, when a concert film is shot, multiple cameras are typically used. In postproduction the takes from the different cameras are spliced and the resulting pieces put together in sync with the sound recording of the musical presentation.

Taking into view non-musical kinds of videos, it stands out that the first videos of several vloggers were one-shot clips, for example BROOKERS's *EmoSpace* and GERIATRIC1927's *first try*. Both vloggers used editing in their later videos. More generally, early videos of several vloggers like BOWIECHICK and THEWINEKONE had fewer cuts than their later ones. This is in analogy with the first decades of cinema: Whereas "early cinema (1895-1905) tended to rely on shots of a fairly long duration since there was often only one shot in each film," with "the emergence of continuity editing in the period of 1905-1916, shots became shorter" (Bordwell and Thompson 284-285). The analogy serves to make sense of vloggers' 'careers' in a very general way. If we look at individual vloggers, things become a lot more complex but also a lot more interesting.

It deserves note, for example, that Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) and Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) both used elaborate opening and closing title sequences in their first videos, while they shunned editing. Their elaborate use of postproduction software to do other things than editing makes their avoidance of editing stand out more clearly: It is unlikely that they simply did not know how to split a take, to eliminate "superfluous frames," and to change the sequence of the footage (Bordwell and Thompson 294). While Tony Huynh's later *Internet*

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Recognition and *Hand Gestures* have brief and comparatively simple opening and closing title sequences, the vlogger extensively used YouTube jump cut editing. Peter Oakley's opening title sequences also became brief and simple over time (e.g. *Telling it all 17*), and a couple of videos have none at all (e.g. *Telling it all 34*). Nevertheless, the vlogger began segmenting his spoken presentation content-wise, taking a rest in-between segments and turning the camera off, thus arriving at videos like *Telling it all 34*, which amounts to 9:16 and has four shots. Arguably, these comparatively inexperienced vloggers discovered that title sequences were inessential and should not draw too much attention to themselves. Editing, by contrast, appears to be a technique whose potential they did not immediately recognize, a technique they had to discover as powerful, and which they began employing in terms of video projects and emerging individual stylistic preferences.

Paul Robinett (RENETTO) worked with different editing modes. *This Is YouTube at its best!* is a one-shot clip he uploaded in August 2006 after posting a variety of videos for three months; that is, it is not a vlogger's first video. Amounting to 9:37, it is long compared to most of his own videos and those of other vloggers. In this subject clip Robinett speaks about Peter Oakley. The day after one of Oakley's videos was 'featured' on YouTube's home page, the pensioner found 4700 notifications about messages, comments, and subscriptions from viewers of his video in his inbox, in response to which he uploaded *Telling it all part 1*. In this video he says that he is "overwhelmed" by the "love" that the "young people" of YouTube are giving him in their comments and messages and wants "to say thank you." He even seems to be crying a bit towards the end of the video. *This Is YouTube at its best!* is Robinett's video response in which he diegetically plays an abbreviated version of Oakley's clip's audio and sheds some tears as well. He says: "I can't wait to see this edited and showing up as me... being an idiot. But, so be it, I'm exposed. [...] [T]his kind of stuff touches me." Obviously, he decided against editing the footage: That is, against shooting further takes and deleting lengthy pauses and digressions. Presenting his performance as a one-shot clip seems to be a decision that Bazin would have approved of, thinking of his praise for Flaherty showing "the actual length" of a waiting period in a hunting scene in *Nanook of the North* as the emotionally most-effective choice (27).

Nevertheless, it deserves note that Robinett skillfully deleted the middle section of *Telling it all part 1* for the diegetic audio playback. Only 1:30 of a 5:52 video remain, and without Oakley's original video

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at hand it would be impossible to spot the cuts. He comments on this procedure:

By the way, the the the... what I just played for you, um, about his video, was edited. Um, I just took a few pieces out. There is a lot in there that he talks about that I didn't have time to put in. Because it was only a... you know... I want you to watch the whole thing. I just wanted to give you ... the heart of it.

Apparently, for Robinett, the “heart” did not include the autobiographical middle section of the video that provided the video’s title and thus seems to have been important for Oakley. In order to support his previously-made argument about a YouTube community with deeply-felt associations between users (in the video *Who are you...Who, Who...Who, Who*, see p. 303), Robinett merely played the ‘communicative’ and emotional parts of the video. This deletion points us to the fact that a ‘faithful’ method of representation does not say anything about the status of the object represented. The longer version of the video, not reduced to its “heart,” would have been less moving for Robinett and less effective in bringing him to tears (making the point about associations on YouTube) – however ‘truthfully’ the tears are “exposed” in the eventual video.

In his study of “a small, random set of vlogs on YouTube,” Aymar Jean Christian claims that an association of unedited videos with “authenticity” and of editing with inauthenticity was “conventional wisdom” on YouTube. This is curious because LONELYGIRL15’s videos were heavily edited from *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* on – yet people initially believed her. I have previously shown that the key decisions to create the impression of a regular vlog were of a cinematic kind. Christian himself quotes the producers of the series making this point.

The analysis of the RENETTO video above suggests an awareness of the impact that decisions about editing would have for the ways a video would work and the effects it would achieve with viewers. However, effects of ‘authenticity’/‘inauthenticity’ do not appear to have been prime concerns: There is no indication in the corpus that vloggers or their viewers were as naïve as to believe that a mere choice of editing would decide such matters. Robinett, for example, performed as a highly artificial character with a funny voice in several one-shot clips like *Proving Science Wrong! - Renetto Reviews*. Generally speaking, a

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vlogger's profilmic presentation appears to have been a lot more important for aiming at various effects. A mode of audiovisual representation determines how profilmic events look and sound in the artifact thus created. However, this mode works independently of the real, fictional, or other status of these events; it guarantees nothing. Vloggers made choices about performance and other audiovisual techniques in terms of their video projects and to achieve diverse effects. This will also become clear in the below study of other editing modes.

Bordwell and Thompson's observations about the association between long takes and mobile framing in film invites us to ask if a similar relationship exists in one-shot clips on video blogs:

If the long take often replaces editing, it should surprise no one that the long take is frequently allied to the mobile frame. The long take may use panning, tracking, craning, or zooming to present continually changing vantage points that are comparable in some ways to the shifts of view supplied by editing. (286)

There is no correlation between shot length and the likelihood of mobile framing in video blogging. The question if a video is a music video/musical performance video or a non-musical video and the nature of the profilmic events seem to be more important. Most one-shot clips are static shots of individual vloggers speaking, playing music, or lip syncing and home dancing.⁷² Nevertheless, such videos are – with the exception of music and musical performance videos – as likely to be edited.⁷³ Videos with more than one performer and/or vast or mobile profilmic events were typically shot with a mobile camera *and* edited.⁷⁴ This is yet another instance of video blogging being special with reference to other audiovisual practices.

⁷² E.g. GERIATRIC1927, *first try*, RENETTO, *This Is YouTube at its best!*; THAUMATA, *new year's eve*; and BROOKERS, *Cell block Tango*.

⁷³ E.g. THEWINEKONE, *Internet Recognition*; GERIATRIC1927, *Telling it all 34*.

⁷⁴ E.g. BROOKERS, *Butterfly*, SMOSH, *Turtles Theme*; MORBECK, *Behind the scenes look*; and RENETTO, *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment*.

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Jump cut editing

When “two shots of the same subject are cut together but are not sufficiently different in terms of camera distance and angle, there will be a noticeable jump on the screen” (Bordwell and Thompson 335). There are numerous videos that have a large number of cuts most of which are such jump cuts. Typically, these shots are static and the camera position does not change between them at all, for example in THEWINEKONE’s *Internet Recognition* (Figs. 5.2.1-2) and BLUNTY3000’s *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*. However, this phenomenon can also be seen in a few videos that employ mobile framing, for example in *Renetto goes TANNING* (Figs. 5.2.3-4).



5.2.1-2 Last and first frame of two subsequent shots in THEWINEKONE’s *Internet Recognition*.



5.2.3-4 Jump cut between two mobile shots showing the tanning studio assistant (*Renetto goes TANNING*).

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For Nate Burr the cumulation of jump cuts in his own and in other vloggers' videos was the result of editing the footage of certain accidents from the profilmic presentation – silent and filled pauses – “out” (*How to make better videos*; see p. 203). In *Renetto goes TANNING*, by contrast, the aim appears to have been to shorten sections of a video, of the conversation with the tanning studio assistant in the front room and the actual tanning procedure in particular. Interestingly, in Jean-Luc Godard's explanation of the jump cuts in *À bout de souffle* – probably the most-famous example of jump cuts in film history – they were the result of shortening a film whose rough cut had been deemed too long:

Belmondo and Seberg had a sequence in a car at a certain moment; and there was a shot of one, then a shot of the other, as they spoke their lines. And when we came to this sequence, which had to be shortened like the others [...] the editor and I [...] said: Instead of slightly shortening one and then slightly shortening the other, and winding up with short little shots of both of them, we're going to cut out four minutes by eliminating one or the other altogether, and then we will simply join the [remaining] shots, like that, as though it were a single shot. Then we drew lots as to whether it should be Belmondo or Seberg – and Seberg remained. (qtd. in Raskin 144)

Jump cut editing in video blogging thus seems to be an alternative to one-shot clips or to a sequence of self-contained longer shots. Of course we do not know if in the case of any two given shots of a video a jump cut resulted from deleting a small section from an individual take; or, if there were two takes with little cinematographic differences to begin with that a vlogger joined. However, such epistemic uncertainties need not prevent us from describing what is out there and how it works, that is, of form and function of videos. I suggest to reserve 'jump cut editing' for videos in which there are many jump cuts; that is, to videos in which the creation of jump cuts by editing material out stands out as a distinct procedure, and jump cuts are not just occasional incidents.

Through jump cut editing videos became shorter, while – at least in the case of eliminating silent and filled pauses – they still held the same amount of 'information;' a video treated in this manner became denser and “faster” (Christian). This mode of editing also communi-

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cated: 'I didn't just talk to the camera but did some work on the video,' and: 'I'm not wasting your time.'

The creation of visual variety was an aesthetic function of this mode of editing. The dominance of static shots in video blogging was a result of vloggers' fulfillment of multiple roles during the shooting stage, most-importantly those of performers and camera operators. The options for the creation of visual variety through mobile framing were thus limited. In certain kinds of videos – public diary and subject clips – visual variety was further limited because the head of a vlogger frontally facing the camera was the prime element of the *mise-en-scène*. Rapidly moving heads and hands (p. 144) and coming closer to- or moving away from the camera (p. 221) were tactics for the creation of visual variety in the context of these constraints. Jump cut editing now, was a further and related tactic to prevent the image from becoming static and of creating visual variety. A body that instantly moves from one shot to the next offers visual variety understood as changes of "line and shape, volumes and depths, stasis and movement" (Bordwell and Thompson 297).

Ironically, Nate Burr seems to acknowledge this function in his illustration of the 'prime' function of the technique: It is unlikely that in the case of this particular sequence all cuts resulted from deleting silent and filled pauses (Figs. 5.2.5-14). It is also conspicuous that the vlogger slightly changed the position of his body when he was not speaking. Later vloggers explicitly advised to change the body's position in this manner (qtd. in Christian). This device was the exact opposite of cutting on action: Instead of showing the beginning of a movement in one shot and the continuation in the other and thus suggesting spatial and temporal continuity (Bordwell and Thompson 315), the movement was shown in none of the shots but discarded in postproduction. With cuts already in mind, Burr moved as soon as he had finished a segment of speech, planning to discard the footage of the movement to create a section of heightened jump cut editing.

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“That’s why my videos have so many [cut] cuts in them. [cut] Because when I talk, [cut] I tend to pause now and again. [cut]”



But nobody wants to watch that [cut] on Youtube. [cut] It’s fine when you’re talking in person to someone because you’ve got an actual conversation going. [cut] But when you’re just a person talking at the camera, [cut]”



there’s no point [cut] leaving that stuff in.”

5.2.5-14 Nate Burr illustrates jump cut editing in ten consecutive shots in *How to make better videos*.

Situating *À bout de souffle* with reference to continuity editing, Bordwell and Thompson note: “Godard violates conventions of spatial, temporal, and graphic continuity by his systematic use of the jump cut. [...] Far from flowing unnoticeable, such cuts are very visible and they disorient the spectator” (335–336). Graphics are partially continuous in the example from *BLUNTY3000*: While the background stays the same, the position of the vlogger, of his head in particular, momentarily changes between shots. Space is also partially continuous: Unlike in the car sequence in *À bout de souffle*, the viewer is not instantly transported

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from one setting to the next by the cut. Time is discontinuous to the extent that we – by looking at the images – realize that a span of profilmic time is missing in the representation. Nevertheless, while there is temporal discontinuity on the image track, the dialogue is continuous in a sense: Doing the test and merely listening to the BLUNTY-3000 sequence with closed eyes makes it impossible to spot the cuts. Thus the relationship of YouTube jump cut editing with reference to continuity editing is more complex than it may initially appear: This mode of editing does not seem to “disorient” the viewer as jump cuts may in *À bout de souffle*. Interestingly, Nate Burr claims that it is “boring and irritating at the same time to watch a video where someone constantly pauses for 15 seconds at a time looks around their room trying to think of what to say next” (my emphasis). Thus jump cut editing may be working in support of a continuous flow of information because it eliminates potentially distracting material. At least with reference to its communicative function, it seems to be a different means to an end that is similar to the end of the continuity system.

The flexibility of duration achieved through jump cut editing and the fact that the duration of a musical recording is not that flexible is probably the reason that vloggers did not use this mode to edit music videos and musical performance videos.

It seems that by June 2006 jump cut editing was recognized as a distinct editing mode among YouTube users. This was when Nate Burr released his second tutorial and associated this kind of editing with “some of the best videos on here.” The producers of LONELYGIRL15 also noticed it and made Bree’s friend Daniel – in the fictional situation of production – edit the LONELYGIRL15 videos in this manner (e.g. *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*). In a heightened jump cut sequence Tony Huynh remarks: “Have you noticed [cut] the increasing amount of people [cut] who have started to edit their videos [cut] like [cut] this? [cut] I wonder [cut] who gave them [cut] that idea?” (THEWINEKONE, *Congratulations*). The second question is rhetorical and obviously meant to suggest that he gave them the idea. He was not altogether wrong: While videos showing a spoken presentation with pauses and mistakes edited out were produced by several vloggers, for example by Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK), their frequency and especially the heightened jump cut (where a vlogger intentionally altered her/his position slightly) were conspicuous in his own videos released in April and May 2006, especially in *Internet Recognition*. This video was featured by YouTube, that is, it appeared on YouTube’s front page and

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as a result received a lot of attention. THEWINEKONE is one of the two vloggers Bree says she 'likes' in *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*.

In *Daniel Responds* – the first video Bree's friend uploaded to his 'own' channel DANIELBEAST – jump cut editing was used. However, unlike in jump cut editing on regular vlogs, about 0.2 seconds of black frames were inserted between shots. An effect of increased discontinuity and thus of visual variety was achieved. The producers of LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST thus took a convention from regular vlogs and creatively used in a slightly different manner.⁷⁵

YouTube jump cut editing was an editing mode that negotiated an economic, coherent, and continuous flow of audiovisual information – primarily of a vlogger speaking – with the creation of visual variety in the context of the scarcity of personnel and the specific limitations of certain kinds of videos. It is possible to find analogies for individual aspects of jump cut editing elsewhere, for example in Godard's *À bout de souffle*, but especially its use to work on static footage of an individual spoken presentation seems to be unique. YouTube jump cut editing is probably best regarded as an editing mode working on its own terms that YouTube videomakers themselves developed in response to certain conditions of production and distribution/exhibition.

Sequence editing

For many videos, a sequence of discrete and non-arbitrarily related shots was devised during preparation, shooting, or postproduction. 'Discrete' means that shots show different parts of profilmic space, or, if they show the same part, still differ in terms of framing. 'Non-arbitrary' is meant to distinguish this mode of editing from illustration editing, where footage was put into succession primarily to work with music and where relationships between shots are felt only via the music; without the music, illustration editing seems arbitrary (see next section). The analysis of this broad mode of editing will proceed from

⁷⁵ It could be debated if this constitutes a narrative inconsistency. In the video Daniel just wants to get a brief message across. Why should he have bothered inserting black frames? Still, the frames could be explained as the results of accidentally pressing a button while hastily editing the video, authenticating his 'amateur' status.

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simple to complex creative acts and relationships between shots in several case studies.

In *Behind the scenes look* Morbeck presents his apartment with the equipment, costume, and props he uses for his videos in ten handheld shots. In some shots a series of items are shown, in others individual items (Figs. 5.2.15-17). The order of items corresponds with a walk through the apartment. Camera distance is roughly motivated by the size of the items in question. The overriding textual function of the video and of the individual acts of presentation is “descriptive” and not “narrative” or “argumentative” in Seymour Chatman’s terminology (11).



5.2.15 “Today, I wanna give you a little behind-the-scenes look.”



5.2.16-17 End of a shot: “Ohh, and here’s my boobies. They’re silicone and I usually stuff them with a couple of socks;” beginning of the next shot: “There’s the infamous Memory Board.”

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In SMOSH's *The California Stereotype Experiment* the story of conducting an experiment and of its failure is narrated with the means of sequence editing. In this story Ian wants to prove the stereotype wrong that every Californian surfs and/or lives next to a movie star. He and his fellow vlogger Anthony, who is operating the camera, live near Sacramento – far from the ocean and the movie industry – and are confronted with these prejudices when meeting people from “out of the state.” The spot they choose for the experiment, however, is not to their advantage: Santa Monica Beach, just a couple of miles from Hollywood. The experiment consists of asking ‘random’ people: “Do you surf?” or “Do you live next to a movie star?” Ian is ‘surprised’ to hear that the interviewees – some of whom are carrying surfboards – surf or live next to Kiefer Sutherland or George Clooney. He increasingly despairs.⁷⁶



5.2.18-19 Ian: “Do you surf?” Interviewee: “Yes.” Ian’s reaction in the next shot (*The California Stereotype Experiment*).

Unlike *Behind the scenes look*, the SMOSH video satisfies Chatman’s definition of a narrative work because a “doubly temporal logic” of story and discourse is created (9). Editing, “the coordination of one shot with the next” (Bordwell and Thompson 294), is functional for the narration of this story. In the first shot Ian introduces viewers to the background and rules of the experiment (Figs. 6.1.5-6). The interviews themselves are nine shots working according to the principle of repetition with a

⁷⁶ This is obviously a video in which accidents were manufactured for comedy’s sake (see pp. 209-210)

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variation, Ian's agitation increasing from one interview/shot to the next. In between interviews are five shots of Ian walking and of his reactions to the failing experiment which provide narrative cohesion. A cause-and-effect relationship between two shots – a shot of an interview with a surfer on the concrete esplanade and a shot of Ian throwing himself to the sand – is conspicuous. Viewers are probably inclined to accept the spatial discontinuity – Ian's sudden appearance on the beach – because it makes sense in terms of the story (Figs. 5.2.18-19). Like in *Behind the scenes look* and unlike in videos employing jump cut editing, we have a sequence of discrete shots: of shots showing different parts of profilmic space.

SMOSH's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* consists of a narrative segment for which sequence editing was employed and a music video segment for which editing was employed as a means of illustrating the music (see next section). In the 14 shots of the first segment the vloggers find a CD or DVD, use it as a frisbee, and try to retrieve it from a sewage pipe it flies into – a pipe which mysteriously leads them back to Anthony's room.

I have already demonstrated how SMOSH efficiently coordinated profilmic presentation, cinematography, and editing to achieve a comparatively complex narration in the first segment, taking into account that only two people were involved in its production (chapter 5.1). More can be said about this, since unlike in *The California Stereotype Experiment*, the vloggers established an axis of action during parts of the first segment of the video, that is, they used conventions from continuity editing for the construction of "filmic space" from "profilmic space" (Kuhn and Westwell). In shots 4, 5, and 6 the axis of action is running along the trajectory of the disc. In shot 4 Ian (right) throws the disc too high for Anthony (left) to catch (Fig. 5.2.20). At the end of the shot both vloggers look left in the direction it has left the frame (Fig. 5.2.21). Shot 5 follows the flying disc (Fig. 5.2.22). The cut between shots 4 and 5 is an eye line match, one shot showing performers looking offscreen and the other showing what (convention makes us believe) they are looking at (Bordwell and Thompson 314). Shot 6 shows Anthony and Ian running after the disc from front-right to back-left (Fig. 5.2.23). Their relative positions in the frame are consistent in this sequence of shots and so is the screen direction of the disc's movement and of their own. The eye line match and the consistent screen directions work to construct a spatial whole (311-312). Viewers are likely to ignore that the vegetation in shots 5 and 6 differs; the space constructed here with conventions from continuity editing does not correspond with profilmic

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space (305). The three camera positions are within a 180° radius on one side of the axis of action, running along the trajectory of the disc. Any hypothetical shot showing movement from left to right would violate the 180° rule and destabilize the space constructed and disorient viewers.



5.2.20-21 Shot 4 (static): Ian throws a CD that Anthony cannot catch.



5.2.22-23 Shot 5 (mobile), which follows the flying CD (my marker), and shot 6 (static).

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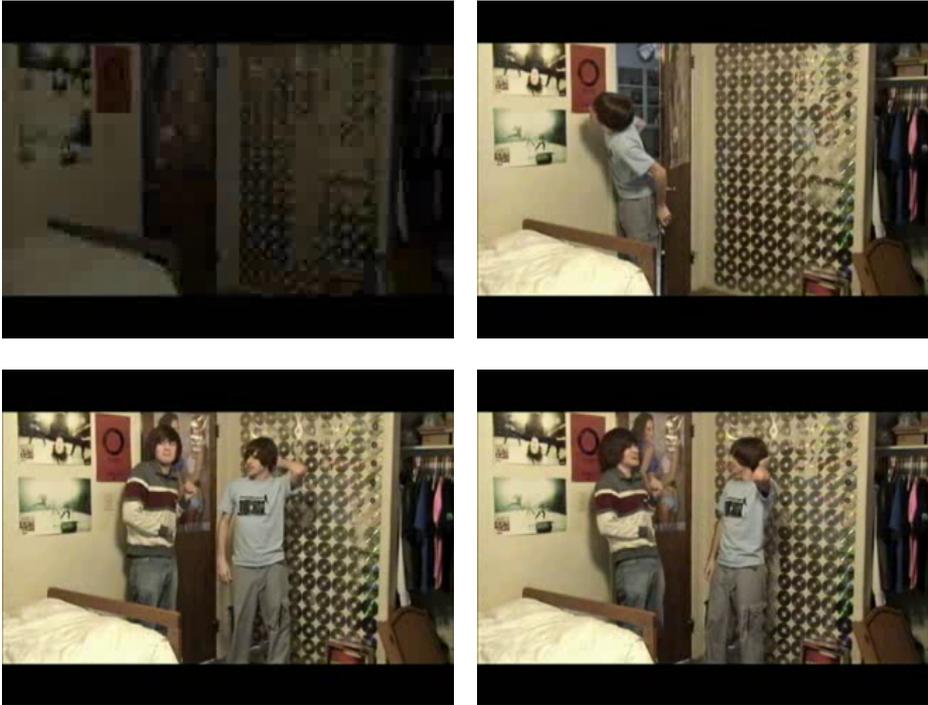


5.2.24-25 Shot 11 (static): CD flies into a pipe. Shot 12 (static): Ian enters trying to get it back.



5.2.26-29 Shot 13 (mobile): Anthony waits for Ian to come back, calls his name, and eventually follows him inside. The camera tilts up, and the image fades out.

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5.2.30-33 Shot 14 (static): Anthony's room, Fade-in. Ian arrives, followed by Anthony. They wonder where they are, eventually realizing they are in Anthony's room.

Two classical conventions for elliptical editing were used for the narration of the last part of the story: fades and empty frames at the end of shot 13 and the beginning of shot 14 (Figs. 5.2.29-30; Bordwell and Thompson 308). By the use of these conventions it is suggested that some time has passed between their walk into the pipe and their arrival in Anthony's bedroom. The narration of the change of place in *Turtles Theme* works because the performers remain the same in both shots, because of the empty frames (we see them leave and reappear elsewhere), and because their order – first Ian, then Anthony – is the same in both shots. Except for the pipe transition, space and time are roughly continuous in the narrative segment of the video.

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In *Renetto goes TANNING* jump cut editing and sequence editing are combined. Jump cut editing abbreviates Robinett's initial conversation with the assistant and the actual tanning session. Other cuts join discrete shots, mostly shots showing different parts of the visit, such as the end of the conversation in the front room and the walk to the room with the tanning bed.

Like in the SMOSH examples, in most of the uses of sequence editing in the RENETTO video temporal order of story and plot are the same. However, there is one interesting case of a flash-forward that deserves attention (Figs. 5.2.34-36). When the assistant shows Robinett around the tanning room, the vlogger – operating the camera from offscreen – asks for possible dangers from the radiation: “Will everything work normal, I mean, with all the rays and all the...,” to which the assistant responds: “No problems” (Fig. 5.2.34). The extradiegetic narrative agency then interrupts the presentation of the conversation with an insert, a single frame taken from the footage of the actual tanning session that is repeated for two seconds (Fig. 5.2.35). The next shot shows the assistant again and the continuation of the conversation (Fig. 5.2.36):

Robinett: You're pretty positive about that.

Assistant: Yeah, we're pretty educated on that.

Robinett: Okay, let's see what happens.

By this time we have already seen what 'might' happen. Even if we, as first-time viewers at least, do not exactly know that the insert is from the actual tanning session, it suggests the possibility of Robinett being physically and mentally hurt.



5.2.34-36 Frames from three successive shots: A flash-forward raises expectations as to a negative outcome of the tanning session.

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In this sequence, suspense is created. The inserted still raises expectations as to the possible outcome of the procedure (see also Bordwell and Thompson 51). These expectations are disappointed during the further course of the video: Robinett is not hurt. The sensor of the iSight camera simply could not cope with the ultraviolet rays from the tanning bed which created the 'toned' look of the insert; and Robinett is merely making a funny face in the footage from which the frame was taken and that was also used to create the insert. The insert, then, is a misleading or at least an ambiguous cue. The positive outcome of the tanning constitutes a surprise to some extent (51). From our everyday knowledge we would not expect someone being physically or mentally hurt by a one-time visit to a tanning studio. Robinett employed editing to create a different expectation and to spice up the narration of the video's story. He created an engaging plot involving suspense, a misleading cue, and a surprise ending.

On LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST we find videos with jump cut editing (*First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* and *Daniel Responds*), and videos in which jump cut editing and sequence editing were combined (*My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*). Once the project was revealed to be fictional, the use of audiovisual techniques and the overall form of videos increased in complexity. While the producers kept using the modes of editing from regular video blogs, their use of these modes became more refined and sophisticated. *On the Run*, a video released two months after the discovery, gives an indication of this.

In *On the Run* Bree and Daniel drive to Bree's parents' house only to find her parents being abducted by two representatives of The Order, a secret cult they are involved with. After picking up some money at the house, the teenagers drive around for several days, in fear of being spotted at either Bree's or Daniel's houses. Eventually, they decide to check into a motel.

Jump cut editing abbreviates their drive from Daniel's to Bree's house at the beginning of the video. When they pull around the corner, they chance upon a representative of The Order escorting Bree's parents into a car. Daniel stops, and Bree, who is operating the camera during their drive, zooms in (Fig. 5.2.37). The next shot provides us with an even better view of the abduction (Fig. 5.2.38). From our film and television viewing experience, we are accustomed to getting a closer view in such a situation; thus it may not initially strike us that this cut is not very plausible in the context of first-person narration from characters being on the run and living in a car. Bree has already exhausted the zoom range of the consumer camera she is supposed to

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be using at the end of the first shot (Fig. 5.2.37). Therefore, in the context of the story, the closer framing of the next shot must have been created in postproduction by enlarging a selected area of the footage. This, like the elaborate editing and sound editing/mixing of the video in general, would have required leisure and focus, but Bree and Daniel have neither in the situation they are in. Thus the elaborate form of this video is not entirely consistent with the story world of which the narration itself is supposed to be part of.



5.2.37-38 Frames from two subsequent mobile shots in *On the Run*, in which Bree and Daniel chance upon the abduction of Bree's parents.

Establishing shots mark the beginning of new scenes in *On the Run*. The video's first shot is a tracking shot providing a roadside view of an upper middle class residential area flying by (Fig. 5.2.39). This particular view and the muffled sound of a car signal that the first scene will be set in a car driving through such an area. The next shot shows Bree in the car giving a short summary of their day thus far (Fig. 5.2.40). The second scene, which is set on a large parking lot with a busy road and a railroad intersection nearby, is introduced by an establishing shot of a train driving by, an event that would not fit into the residential area setting from the first scene. The lights of the train also suggest a different time of the day (Fig. 5.2.41).

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5.2.39-40 The video's first shot: A residential area flying by. The next shot: Bree in Daniel's car.



5.2.41 A train at dusk: Establishing a new setting at the beginning of the second scene.

Like in SMOSH's *Turtles Theme*, fades narrate the passing of time in LONELYGIRL15's *On the Run*, in this case, primarily the transition from one day of their escape to the next. Additionally, montage sequences narrate long periods of story time using little screen time (see Bordwell and Thompson 332). A series of brief unmatched tracking shots of traffic with decreasing sunlight which is accompanied by continuous non-diegetic music concludes the narration of their first day on the road (Figs. 5.2.42-45). Because the light in the last shot is already very low, the fade-out feels 'natural' (Fig. 5.2.45).

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5.2.42-45 Shots from a montage sequence narrating an afternoon and evening on the road. The fade-out concludes the narration of that day.

Not only image editing, also sound editing and mixing are pretty advanced in *On the Run* and other videos of the second type. Bree's first lines in the video – "I've been calling my parents all day. They don't pick up, and they haven't called me back" – can be heard towards the end of the establishing shot, while we only see Bree speaking in the second shot (Figs. 5.2.39-40). Sound bridges smoothen the transition from one scene to the next: The noises of the train that is shown in the establishing shot of the second scene (Fig. 5.2.41) can already be heard towards the end of the last shot of the previous scene in Bree's neighborhood (see also Bordwell and Thompson 374).

Sequence editing encompassed simple to complex editing that created sequences of discrete and non-arbitrarily related shots. Shots were distinct in terms of what they showed and/or of framing.

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Sequence editing was mostly used in narrative videos, however, it can also be found in a video with a “descriptive” overall text-type (Chatman 11). It also necessary to keep in mind that editing was not a necessary condition for a narrative function of videos on vlogs: In videos with narrating performers, for example in public diary clips, there is a “doubly temporal logic” of “Discourse” and “Story” (9), while they may in fact be non-narrative on the level of audiovisual delivery. GERIATRIC1927’s *first try* is a narrative video by dint of its narrating performer, but it consists of a single shot.

In several videos conventions from continuity editing, such as the 180° system and establishing shots, can be found. For *How Not to Make a First Impression*, a video not analyzed in this chapter, SMOSH used a shot/reverse-shot pattern (see Figs. 2.3.1-2). Unlike YouTube jump cut editing, sequence editing does not seem to be a very distinct mode compared with editing in other audiovisual practices.

Most importantly, the analysis suggests that vloggers recognized the powers of specific devices of editing for specific purposes, as SMOSH’s use of the 180° system and RENETTO’s use of the flash-forward in his *TANNING* video indicate. The question of the overall form of videos that has been touched upon in this section in passing will be a prime concern in chapter 6.

Illustration editing

Music videos – on video blogs and elsewhere – are created to support musical recordings that already exist. The images of music videos are meant to ‘work’ with these recordings. The “organization” of the images with reference to the recordings (Schank 201) concerns profilmic space/events, cinematography, and editing.

I already pointed out that there were two discrete ways of producing music videos in video blogging in 2005 and 2006 (p. 123). While one-shot clips were the result of the first approach (see above), clips that sported illustration editing were typically the result of the second, of the labor-intensive mode of production. In the second approach diverse visual materials were created and assembled to support the musical recording which provided the sound track for the eventual music video. I suggest to understand illustration editing as a mode of editing in which graphical, rhythmical, spatial, and temporal relationships between shots are primarily felt by dint of/via their relationship to the musical recording on the sound track.

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For the second segment of SMOSH's *Turtles Theme*, profilmic space/events, cinematography, and editing were employed to illustrate the theme song of an animated children's action series started in 1987. Since the 'control' of the music over profilmic space/events and cinematography in music videos has not been accounted for in the chapters dealing with these techniques, this will briefly be done here.



5.2.46-47 Ian mouths the lyrics which Anthony enacts: "Leonardo leads. [Cut] Donatello does machines."



5.2.48-49 The "evil Shredder" and Splinter who "taught them to be ninja teens."

At the level of profilmic space and events illustration is conspicuous in the parts of the video that introduce the characters of the action series. While Ian lip syncs the lyrics naming and describing each of the heroic turtles with a trait, Anthony enacts characters and traits in the respective shots. Setting, props, and performance are chosen to fulfill

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this purpose (Figs. 5.2.46-47). There is some graphic, but little spatial and temporal continuity between the images themselves. The musical recording on the sound track is continuous.

Unlike the heroic turtles, their arch-enemy Shredder (a human enamored with blades all over his body) and their martial arts instructor Splinter (a humanoid rat) were not enacted by the vloggers. The “evil Shredder” is represented by a paper shredder sucking in a paper print of a photograph showing Anthony’s face (Fig. 5.2.48). Splinter is represented by a mouse or rat mascot – possibly of the college the vloggers were going to – under whose supervision the vloggers/turtles exercise (Fig. 5.2.49).

All of these visualizations differ in terms of technique and form from the animated images of the original title sequence that also illustrated the theme song. SMOSH did not imitate the title sequence but created something new and unique. In no way, then, is ‘illustration’ meant to suggest a lack of imagination – on the contrary: The vloggers show a lot of imagination in their employment of domestic and local settings and props. Their illustration is tongue-in-cheek and takes up a position with reference to the television series and its theme song that oscillates between childhood nostalgia and parody.



5.2.50-52 SMOSH being drawn to the camera and starting to lip sync the theme song in a shot with increased presentation speed.

SMOSH manipulated the speed of the beginning of the first shot of the music video segment to last exactly as long as the ‘swoosh’ sound at the beginning of the theme song. Thus cinematography was also made to support the video’s illustrative function with reference to the music. During shooting the performers moved from the door of Anthony’s room towards the camera to start lip syncing the first lines of the song. In postproduction the speed of their walk was increased. They appear to be magically drawn to the camera by the ‘swoosh’ on the sound track and, robot-like, begin their lip sync (Figs. 5.2.50-52). This transi-

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tion makes us feel the two different ‘regimes’ of audiovisual organization in the different segments of the video.

Lip sync and other footage was edited – cut and assembled – to work with the theme song in SMOSH’s *Turtles Theme*. The position and duration of the “Leonardo’s lead” and “Donatello does machines” lip sync footage in the video were adjusted to create a synchronicity of the lip movements with the lyrics of the theme song. The Turtles’ retaliation of the Shredder attack – repetitively hitting the office machine with improvised props – is shown only until the next line of the lyrics “Splinter taught them to be ninja teens” requires a different image (Fig. 5.2.49). Compared to music videos in which editing is coordinated with the beats and bars of the music (Schank 205), the lyrics seem to be of prime importance in SMOSH’s video: While they are pretty accurately matched with the lines of the lyrics, the Leonardo, Donatello, Shredder, and Splinter shots do not appear on a prominent or regular beat or on a recognizable beat at all.

Using Johannes Menge’s model for classifying music videos, we can refer to the second segment of *Turtles Theme* as a “situative” concept video, since brief narrative parts (such as the Shredder attack and its retaliation) or singular non-narrative situations (such as the exercising) were put into sequence without being part of an overall narrative (195-197).

Apart from *Turtles Theme*, *Butterfly* (BROOKERS), and *Little Wonder* (BOWIECHICK) are examples of music videos on regular vlogs in which illustration editing was used. Before, in the story narrated on LONELY-GIRL15, Bree and Daniel had to worry about secret cults and flee the domesticity of Bree’s bedroom, they had leisure to shoot and upload a music video; a video sporting illustration editing (*Grillz feat. Daniel-beast, LG15, P. Monkey, and O’n*).

Unlike one-shot clip editing for music videos, illustration editing does not appear to be a distinct YouTube approach because in the music industry various visual materials are also manipulated with visual effects and edited to work with pre-existing musical recordings that provide the sound track of the eventual music video (see Menge 195).

However, music videos of both editing modes are distinct in terms of the profilmic events that were shown: With very few exceptions the vloggers (or fictional vlogger characters) were shown – and not the vocalists and instrumentalists associated with the record. While there is the option that stars do not appear in music videos from the industry,

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this in effect rare; only 3,3% of the videos Menge studied do not show the star (195). In video blogging there appears to have been an understanding that pop stars provided the musical recordings and vloggers the images. Moreover, there appears to have been a convention that the stars must not be seen in the videos, that the images are off-limits for the stars. I already suggested that the mismatch between the singer that can be heard on the sound track and the vlogger that is shown lip syncing in the images of lip sync music videos opened up a space in which various positionings – homage, parody, etc. – could happen (p. 197). The same can be said for music videos on video blogs in general.

Editing in conclusion

Like in other audiovisual practices, editing was a fundamental technique of audiovisual creation in video blogging. This can be inferred from the fact that editing was very common, and that many of vloggers' creative decisions concerned editing – even if the decision, in the case of individual videos, was to produce a one-shot clip.

I made sense of editing in video blogging in terms of four different modes: one-shot clip editing, jump cut editing, sequence editing, and illustration editing. To form these categories, I analyzed videos from the corpus. The extent to which these modes of editing show similarities or seem to be related to editing in other audiovisual practices differs greatly. The coexistence and combination of these editing modes in the practice video blogging in 2005 and 2006 is distinct.

The most important insight from the study of editing seems to be that vloggers purposefully employed editing on the level of modes and on a smaller level to support specific video projects they were working on and to achieve specific results. Depending on the time they wanted to bring up and other factors, vloggers could decide about producing a music video as a one-shot clip or through illustration editing. Significantly, Brooke Brodack created the one-shot clip *Cell block Tango* after *Butterfly*, which was labor-intensive and put her camera and software to its limits, as she complains in the closing titles of *Butterfly*. Paul Robinett found that in a one-shot clip he could 'spend' an uninterrupted span of time with his viewers, which was apt for the emotional argument made in *This Is YouTube at its best!*. The vloggers of BLUNTY3000 and THEWINEKONE strategically employed jump cut editing. When editing *Renetto goes TANNING*, Paul Robinett used a flash-

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forward to create suspense and a misleading cue. Hecox and Padilla (SMOSH) utilized sequence editing and illustration editing to implement a narrative and a music video segment in *Turtles Theme* respectively – and were very creative in both segments.

Notably, even though ‘interesting’ transitions, such as wipes, dissolves, and irises were features that developers of consumer postproduction software boasted with, these were rarely used by vloggers. They were most likely regarded as toys or gimmicks, just as they are in other audiovisual practices.

6 Form: Unity, Structure, and Coherence

The aim of this chapter is to study the form of vloggers' videos. Focuses are on the topics unity, structure, and coherence. In the first part these topics will be studied on the level of the individual video, in the second part on the level of all the videos uploaded to a channel.

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Following Bordwell and Thompson's definition of "film form," I understand a video's form as a "set of related, interdependent elements" (59) and as "the overall system of relations that we can perceive among the elements" (49).

A prerequisite for the study of the form of YouTube videos is the recognition that there were no limitations in this regard from the interface during the time of interest: As long as a technically flawless audio-video file was provided and supplied with a title, it was acceptable and came into being as a YouTube video on the platform. YouTube invited viewers to police videos in terms of their content, but there were no such rules with regards to form (see "Community Guidelines," Internet Archive, 24 Oct. 2006; and p. 41).

Choices of setting, performance, cinematography, editing, and other techniques made during all stages of production could contribute to the emergence of an audiovisual artifact with an overall form. In this chapter, I study the form of videos created through choices in all of these techniques.

Somewhat surprisingly to me, apart from Bordwell and Thompson, Aristotle's *Poetics* proved fruitful in providing concepts to make sense of the form of videos on vlogs. This suggests that they can be situated in a long history of other formations of time-based cultural artifacts.

Unity

Do the elements we find in a video appear to be part of a whole? What gives unity to videos on vlogs? Is unity in a matter of degree? I already suggested that videos were typically dedicated to single objects, and that a function of these objects was to provide videos with unity (p. 86).

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Kinds of objects depended on the kinds of projects pursued in the cases of specific videos. If the project was to give an account of the activities of a day as in a public diary clip, these activities would be the single object. If the project was to speak about a topic, as in a subject clip, the topic would be the single object. If a music video was meant to be created, the sound recording of the single piece of pop music that was chosen would be the object. In the following, I want to support this argument and illustrate how this worked out in videos.



6.1.1-2 The vlogger of PAYTOTHEORDEROFOFOF2 shouts out “thewinekone.” Tony Huynh reacts: “Shout-outs to me? And of girls?” (THEWINEKONE, *Internet Recognition*).

Tony Huynh’s *Internet Recognition* is a subject clip whose topic is the vlogger’s recent popularity with female viewers of his videos. This topic is introduced at the beginning of the video: Each of three brief shots shows a computer screen on which another YouTube video is playing in which a female user mentions Huynh’s user name in a shout-out sequence of a video (Fig. 6.1.1). After these “thewinekone” shots, Huynh is shown in the next shot and begins his vocal delivery: “Okay, okay, seriously: What the fuck is going on? Shout-outs to me? And of girls? Girls never do that. They never call me in real life” (Fig. 6.1.2). The vast majority of material that follows is related to the topic introduced in these four shots, to the video’s single object. The vlogger talks about his lack of popularity with girls in real life and provides examples, like a typical situation in “a bar or club” (Figs. 6.1.20-21). He speaks about the female attention he is getting, and how he feels about it: It freaks him out. He repeats some of these points in variation. He also talks about the increasing number of jealous male users who

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write hateful comments and announces to delete these comments and block these users at the end of the video.

In *Internet Recognition* digressions from the topic are recognizable as such for the vlogger and for viewers. After a short digression, Huynh says: “Alright, so let’s go back to the attention that I’m getting on the Internet” and continues with his topic. Choosing single topics in subject clips then allows vloggers who do not spend a lot of time on preparation to remain focused during their spoken presentation and gives them something ‘to return to’ if they should digress. As has been previously shown, vloggers typically made a decision about a video project and object before turning the camera on, that is, in the preparation stage of production. Editing could be used to increase the unity of a video in postproduction: Vloggers could – and probably did – ‘edit’ digressive footage ‘out’ in the same way they treated lengthy pauses and fillers.

In many videos the number and order of elements in the middle part does not seem to be essential for the impression of overall unity. In *More youtube ranting - How to make better videos!* (BLUNTY3000) individual items of videomaking advice could have been easily added, discarded, or their order changed. The same is true for the interviews SMOSH are conducting in *The California Stereotype Experiment*, and for the news items Brodack presents in *Brookers News*. However, in these videos elements that were no advice to make “better videos,” interviews relating to stereotypes about California, or news items would give the impression of a “flaw” of unity, would seem “out of place in relation to the rest” (Bordwell and Thompson 65).

Even if number and order of elements in the list-like middle parts of these videos are not always critical, vloggers sometimes communicate that there are ‘enough’ elements. Burr says at the end of his list of advice in the above-mentioned tutorial: “Okay, I’m done ranting about YouTube for now. Probably more to come soon.”⁷⁷ Single objects – in subject clips and other videos – allowed vloggers and by implication their videos to come to an end. *David Holzman’s Diary* is a fictional autobiographical film not dedicated to “a single piece of action and the

⁷⁷ Even though he used *More youtube ranting* as a part of the title of his second tutorial, Nate Burr is in fact dealing with different topics in the tutorials *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube* and *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!* which the rest of the titles and the videos themselves make clear.

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whole of it,” as Aristotle would have it (section 1451a), but to a character’s live in general. Christine N. Brinckmann argues that Jim McBride, the filmmaker behind the project, chose the only convincing ending for the film: the theft of Holzman’s filmmaking equipment (92). The function of choosing a single object with regards to the possibility of a video to end is particularly obvious in the case of music videos, where the structure of single already existing musical recording (with an ending) influences (if not determines) the overall structure of the video (see p. 275).

On the long run, dealing with single objects made vloggers create a variety of videos because they were unlikely to produce a video with the same object again (see 6.2). With regards to reception, single objects allowed viewers to know what a video was ‘about’ and to follow it through from beginning to end.

The choice of single objects for videos (and the beginning, middle, and end structure that is the topic of the next section) are attributes of video on vlogs that situate them in the context of various formations of cultural artifacts. The question of everyday or commercial creativity recedes with regards to these very general attributes. Aristotle claims that in all “arts of representation” a “single object” should be represented (section 1451a). On a prescriptive and descriptive level these are examples of conventions which are so general that they “operate in the background, learned and applied without explanation or even awareness” (Bordwell 25).

In all the examples of unified videos provided thus far, video titles were indicative of the object of a video. Vloggers used titles to emphasize and affirm the unity of their videos. Searchability – the need to make videos manageable for search algorithms and viewers – probably played an even more important part for descriptive naming.

However, there was no guarantee that a title would do the job if a video was not very unified at the time of being uploaded because a vlogger never chose a single object or did not stick to an object during shooting, and/or did not discard footage in postproduction. It may be interesting to look at the titles of such videos. Melody Oliveria named a video of assorted topics and activities *Don’t know what the title should be*. Tony Huynh ended up calling a video *Hotness Prevails / Worst Video Ever*, the first part of the title referring to the temperature at the time of shooting, the second part to the lack of unity and coherence. Vloggers seem to have been aware if they were or were not producing unified videos. Some vloggers even explicated this knowledge; in

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Hotness Prevails / Worst Video Ever Huynh complains: “This rant is going nowhere. [...] I was here. But now I’m here. Always off-topic.”

If a vlogger chose a single object for a video and stuck with it at large, further options arose. Interestingly, Nate Burr starts off his presentation in *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!* with a misleading cue about the video’s object which turns out to be part of a joke: “So, I lost a really good friend of mine last night. [Dramatic pause] Ohh, he didn’t die. He’s just really good at hide-and-seek.” He moves on to the video’s real topic designated by the title. When he has finished his list of videomaking advice, he adds a brief off-topic remark about male fans sending him kinky pictures of themselves. Such off-topic elements do not mar the overall unity of the video but merely add a little complexity.

In a few videos dedicated to single objects the relationship between title and video is less straightforward than in the examples above. Burr named a subject clip about the threatened species of the Tasmanian Devil *Better the devil you know*. Misleading titles vaguely or explicitly suggesting sexual content were common on YouTube: *The One about Shaved Pussy*, also on BLUNTY3000, does not turn out to be “about” shaved female private parts but about the neighbor’s cat coming over to the vlogger’s house with its hair removed by its owners. Such titling played with viewers’ expectations, it could be original and add complexity to a video (see also Bordwell & Thompson 58). However, it could also simply be a blatant tool to get views (see Greenberg), as Burr himself complains in another video (*Lets just call this one Fagsus*).

With few exceptions the vloggers of BROOKERS, SMOSH, RENETTO, and BLUNTY3000 produced unified videos. Those of BOWIECHICK, THEWINEKONE, and GAYGOD produced unified videos most of the time. The only vlogger in the corpus who hardly ever produced a video with unity was Peter Oakley of GERIATRIC1927. In *Telling it all part 3*, for example, he speaks about his demobilization in 1945, his military service (i.e. he goes back in story time for no apparent reason), about his demobilization again, returning to his old job after the war, doing a second apprenticeship in Leicester, meeting his future wife, starting to work for the local public health department, and quitting his job to start a motorcycle workshop. He did not talk about single topics or pieces of action; and his viewers could never be sure that he was through with a topic. He did not make use of descriptive titles to provide videos with unity either. Unlike ‘*part 3*’ suggested, the video was not providing a segment/episode of an ongoing story; it was more of an index for uploaded videos.

Beginning – middle – ending

Aristotle's normative view at the temporal structure of drama and prose – “[a] whole is what has a beginning and middle and end” (*Poetics*, 1450 b) – can be used to describe the structure of virtually all videos created and uploaded by the video bloggers of the corpus: Even in videos with little overall unity, a beginning and an ending were created. GERIATRIC1927, for example, began all of his videos with a spoken salutation and ended them with a goodbye. This three-part structure appears to have been the lowest common denominator of large-scale video structure in video blogging in 2005 and 2006. I want to provide an overview of the devices vloggers used to create beginnings and endings and illustrate these with case studies of BOWIECHICK's *Weird arms* and SMOSH's *The California Stereotype Experiment*.

Vloggers created beginnings and endings during all stages of production and through various techniques: setting, profilmic presentation, cinematography, editing, and titling. Some of the devices could be realized through different techniques while others only through a specific technique. It will become clear that some of the devices are of a very general kind, to be found in different kinds of videos, while others are germane to specific kinds.

Salutations and farewells were common devices to begin and end public diary clips, subject clips, and self/world documentaries. Vloggers also commonly provided names – first names, user names, or ‘production company’ names – in speech or on title cards. A more elaborate spoken personal introduction was typical for a first public diary clip. If a setting was used for the first time, this could receive a dedicated introduction through speech or other techniques as well. A video's title was frequently communicated not only on top of the video player of a video page but also in the video itself, typically on a title card at the beginning. The topic of a subject clip and the activity or place to be shown in a self/world documentary were commonly introduced through speech. This sometimes involved a contextualization, for example by providing a reason for the choice. In the case of related videos (see next chapter), vloggers sometimes made a reference to a previous video at the beginning or to a future video at the end. Shout-outs can be found at the end of some public diary and subject clips. Entrances and exits were rare devices to begin and end a video, while fades were very common. Several vloggers used theme music to begin and end their videos, typically as a part of an opening or closing title sequence in

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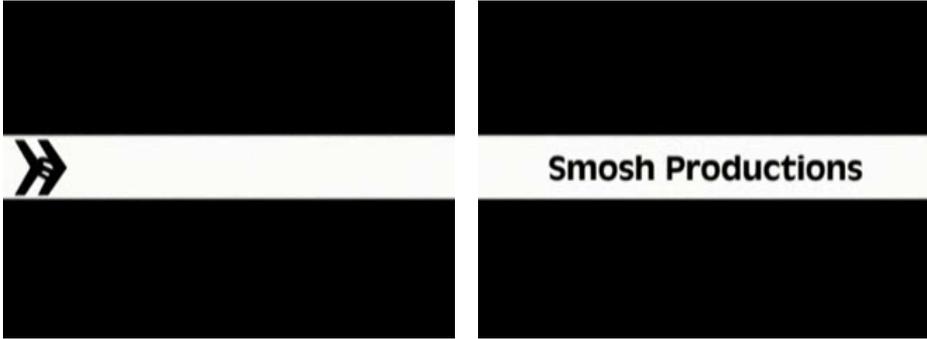
which several techniques interacted. In a music video the beginning and ending of the musical piece typically contributed to the constitution of a beginning and ending of the overall video.

In several narrative videos a problem or challenge was presented to begin with. Compared to merely stating the video's object, this was a qualitatively different kind of beginning in terms of its implications for the relationship among the individual parts and for viewer engagement. Stating a video's object merely involved announcing what was to come. Posing a problem or challenge at the beginning created an unsatisfactory situation that was promised to be resolved in the end.⁷⁸ Presenting a solution or result then was the corresponding way to end a video.

At the beginning of the one-shot clip *Weird arms*, Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) introduces us to the video's object and the context of choosing it: "People always make fun of the way my arms bend or they are kind of frightened by it. Hey, look!" Then she presents her flexible elbow to the camera, which constitutes the middle part of the video (Figs. 2.4.2-4). As a manner of closing she calls for responses: "If your arm bends like that, let me know because I don't want to be the only one." This is an instance of what we might call a 'one-off' middle part, a middle part in which an individual item is presented – be it a skill like in *Weird arms*, an event, place, or simple message (see e.g. *Gay God would rather masturbate than...*). Such one-offs are rare but interesting and relevant for thinking about overall form. While choosing single objects facilitated vloggers' finding an end for the list-like middle parts of *How to make better videos*, *The California Stereotype Experiment*, and *Brookers News*, still, a dedicated authorial act was necessary to make each of these lists and videos end. The strange nature of video project and object of a one-off video, by contrast, appears to force a video to end (see also Schneider 196).

⁷⁸ See also Bordwell and Thompson 80; and Schneider 206.

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6.1.3-4 Frames from animated title card of the opening title section of *The California Stereotype Experiment*.



6.1.5-6 The first shot of the video in which several devices are used to constitute a beginning.

The vloggers of SMOSH used a variety of the above-mentioned devices to devise an overall structure for *The California Stereotype Experiment*. A title sequence of five seconds provides the logo and name of the vlogger's video production identity (Figs. 6.1.3-4). On the sound track we hear a brief sample from the pop song "California" by Phantom Planet: the word "California" from the song's chorus. The sample is followed by Ian Hecox's offscreen shout: "Shut up!" SMOSH begin all their videos with a variation of this title sequence. Ian always tells someone to shut up while the sample to which he is responding changes and is related to the object of the respective video. To viewers familiar with their videos, the vloggers thus introduce themselves via the title sequence and also already provide a hint at the video's

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object. The video title and the full names of the vloggers are superimposed onto the first shot (Figs. 6.1.5-6). In this shot Ian's onscreen speech also contributes to the creation of a beginning:

Hi. We're here at the beautiful Santa Monica Beach in L.A. What I'm gonna do today is a little experiment. You know, I've been asked a lot of times, since I live in California, I've been asked by people out of the state: "Do you live next to a movie star? Do you surf?" Everyone who lives in California always gets that. So, what I'm gonna do today is prove that stereotype wrong. I'm gonna go out and ask just random people out here on the beach if they do actually surf or live next to a movie star. Because I know that I'm gonna be right and all those idiots are gonna be wrong, the people who have stereotypes.

After a brief salutation, Ian introduces viewers to a setting they did not encounter in a SMOSH video before: Santa Monica Beach. His spoken introduction of the setting is supported by Anthony Padilla who briefly pans left and right. Ian then states the activity that will be the object of this tongue-in-cheek self/world documentary: conducting an 'experiment' to prove stereotypes about California wrong. He also contextualizes the experiment by providing a reason for conducting it. At the beginning of this particular video, a challenge is posed, and expectations about an outcome are voiced. This is an example of a video that uses narration to profoundly engage viewers to continue watching and wait for the outcome – compared to many other narrative videos at least (see next section).

The middle part of the video 'lists' the individual interviews. All interviewees (that are shown in the eventual video) respond that they surf or live next to a movie star. While the exact number of interviews that are shown is probably not critical, the failure of the experiment will increasingly become conspicuous to viewers. SMOSH make a dedicated move to end their video through Ian's onscreen acknowledgment that the result of the experiment is utter failure: "Everyone fucking surfs or lives next to a movie star. [...] I'm out of here." Ian runs off, trying to 'exit,' while Anthony, speaking from offscreen, runs after him mock-trying to convince him to continue and ask further people. Eventually superimposed closing credits are faded in (Fig. 6.1.7).

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6.1.7 Frame from the last shot of *The California Stereotype Experiment*.

The large-scale structure of beginning, middle, and ending does not make videos on vlogs appear distinct but situated within the context of other formations of time-based cultural artifacts. The same is true for the devices that were used, which are all familiar from documentary and fiction film and television formats, from television news in particular. The choice of devices depended on the video projects and objects and on the kinds of videos vloggers were producing.

The virtual universality of beginning, middle, and ending suggests that videos on vlogs had a high degree of closure, not only on the level of the material qualities of the uploaded audio-video files (i.e. having a first frame and a last) and because they could not be altered once uploaded (see pp. 40 and 124), but also on the level of their internal temporal structure. They were discrete audiovisual artifacts. To what extent individual videos were part of larger structures, will be the topic of chapter 6.2.

Coherence in different audiovisual ‘text-types’

The question of a video’s unity basically assessed the degree to which elements in a video appeared to ‘really’ belong together, appeared to ‘really’ be parts of the video; it did not ask so much for relationships between elements. The previous section was largely concerned with the temporal structure of videos. A structure of beginning, middle, and ending points to the question of the relationship of elements to each other, for it is obvious that the elements that begin a video would not work or would work differently if they were put elsewhere. The parts

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beginning, middle, and ending are functional with reference to each other, are ‘asking’ for each other, and ‘stick’ together. Introducing a video object at the beginning requires a middle part in which that object plays an important role, for example.

The aim of this section is thus to look at the relationships between elements in a video: Why and how do elements ‘stick’ together? Why does a video not ‘fall apart’? How do elements relate to each other and work for each other? How does a video constituted by elements cohere?

I suggest that the relationships between the elements in a video and the video’s overall mode of coherence – beyond the obvious relationship between elements at the beginning, middle, and ending, and between these overall parts in general – depends on the overriding text-type of a video. I am using Seymour Chatman’s distinction between narrative, argumentative, and descriptive “text-types” in written and audiovisual artifacts in this section (9). Due to the fact that videos with an overall text-type “description” are rare on the video blogs of the corpus, they are not specifically dealt with here. Because the mode of coherence of music videos is accounted for by neither of Chatman’s terms and because music videos are common, I propose a fourth text-type – ‘musical form’ – to account for this kind of coherence.

Simple and pronounced narration

Seymour Chatman’s trias has already been used to make sense of some of the differences between different kinds of videos (chapter 2.3). According to Chatman, “what makes narrative unique among the text-types” is the “doubly temporal logic” of “Discourse” and “Story” (9). Unlike examples of other text-types, narrative artifacts operate on both temporal levels. “Narration,” then, is the process mediating between these levels; it “is the moment-by-moment process that guides us in building the story out of the plot” (Bordwell and Thompson 83). The chronological relationship between the events in story time is what makes elements of narrative videos cohere on a basic level. This applies to both factual and fictional narrative videos.

I propose a heuristic distinction between simple and pronounced narration in videos on vlogs. Most of the devices that are categorized under pronounced narration here are pretty standard in narrative cinema. However, because they stick out as special and as devices that

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vloggers used to add narrative complexity they deserve to be called pronounced in the context of video blogging itself.

In videos with simple narration story order is largely preserved by the plot. Ellipses and summaries are straightforward. There is little creation and ongoing manipulation of expectations from the narrating performer or audiovisual narrator. Melody Oliveria's spoken narration of what she thought of as the most relevant or interesting activities of her day in *First Videoblog* is an example of simple narration.

Also in videos with a dominance of audiovisual over vocal delivery simple narration can be found. In SMOSH's *A Day in the Life of Smosh-LA Edition* documentary footage of their trip to Los Angeles is edited with large ellipses in chronological order. The viewer sees some of their drive, their hotel room, activities at the beach, the hotel room again, and their drive back. Whereas the events that are narrated (i.e. the *histoire*) in the first segment of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* are extravagant – most of all the sewage pipe that wondrously leads straight into Anthony's room – the narration itself (i.e. the *discourse*) is pretty linear and with little build up and ongoing manipulation of viewers' expectations (see Figs. 5.2.20-33). Still, in all narrative videos – simple and pronounced – decisions were made about whether an event of the story should be communicated and how this should be done.

In the context of video blogging, videos in which story time is complexly manipulated in terms of order, duration, or frequency in the plot (Bordwell and Thompson 306-309) stick out as examples of pronounced narration. The creation of suspense, the build up and ongoing manipulation of expectations are also narrative strategies that can be called pronounced in the audiovisual practice.

The flash-forward in *Renetto goes TANNING* manipulates the order of events in the tanning studio to create suspense and raise an expectation that is disappointed later in the video (see p. 249). At the beginning of SMOSH's *The California Stereotype Experiment* suspense about the outcome of the experiment is created. Ian is positive about proving stereotypes about California wrong – and maybe also his viewers. Yet the audiovisual narrative agency only shows us interviewees who surf or live next to movie stars. One of them even says that he “went surfing with Owen Wilson the other day.” Because it raises expectations that are fundamentally disappointed later, the narration can be called pronounced.

In *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*, the audiovisual narrator cross-cuts between a regular day in Bree's room and Bree and Daniel's

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hiking trip. The contrast between the everyday and the holiday is highlighted by showing the domestic images in black and white and a traditional television aspect ratio while the outdoors images are shown in color and a widescreen ratio (Figs. 6.1.8-9). In this video spatial and temporally discontinuous material is crosscut for the creation of contrast and to make a point about Bree being an inmate in her religious parents' house. The producers made Bree attribute the postproduction of this video to Daniel in the video description: "Basically Daniel and I got to go hiking yesterday and he edited it into a cool summery video... yeah Summer!" The montage sequences in LONELYGIRL15's *On the Run* are certainly a more sophisticated device to manipulate the story's duration in the plot than straight ellipses (Figs. 5.2.42-45).



6.1.8-9 Domestic television blues crosscut with colorful 'cinematic' outdoors action in *My Parents... Let Us Go Hiking!!!*

Casual argument

Distinct from the narrative text-type, "[a]rgument is the text-type that relies on logic, at least in the informal sense. [...] Arguments are texts that attempt to persuade an audience of the validity of some proposition, usually proceeding along deductive or inductive lines" (9-10). Arguments "do not have an internal time sequence, even though, obviously, they take time to read, view, or hear. Their underlying structures are static or atemporal – synchronic not diachronic" (10). The equivalent concept in Aristotle's *Poetics* is "thought," which "you find in speeches which contain an argument that something is or is not, or a general expression of opinion" (1450b).

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Building on Chatman, we can describe the overall text-type of several videos or segments of videos, especially of subject clips, as casual argument. YouTube users' term for this mode of speaking is "ranting" (e.g. *More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*). In such videos, they make an evaluative statement with reference to a topic, provide some grounds for the statement, and imply or explicitly make an appeal to viewers to simply agree or to do something specific. The order of 'statement – evidence – appeal' is sometimes inverted, but these functional parts still depend and work for each other in a manner that is germane to this text-type. The relationship of the elements in a video in which the overall text type is argument would thus be constituted by their mutual dependence on each other for making an argument. That is, we would feel that something was missing in a video in which an evaluative statement was made without any supporting evidence. The 'casual' is a necessary qualification because vloggers typically do not provide a lot of evidence to support their claims. What stands in for this is an emphatic tone and repetition. The overall rhetorical structure of such arguments is also simple.

THEWINEKONE's *3:00 AM Madness* consists of a general introduction and two rants: one about vloggers who "talk to the camera with dead eyes and a dead face," and another about vloggers who "lip sync" in their videos. Each of these rants begins with Huynh's statement that he has a "beef" with the respective people. Then he delivers scathing illustrative impressions. These presentations illustrate by providing an example, but they also seem to show off what is wrong with the respective activity and thus present some informal evidence for Huynh's judgment. The vlogger provides further evidence by saying: "It doesn't make any sense to me," and, in the second rant: "They are not good. They are not funny." In the first rant the 'evidence' is followed by an explicit appeal of what to do instead: "Use expressions! Use hand gestures! Loud voices! Expressive Eyes!" In the second rant his appeal is more general: "Do something innovative, something unique, that someone has never done on a webcam and then show it to the world." He then provides several examples of what he thinks might be such activities.

Interestingly, while the middle part of Nate Burr's second tutorial *How to make better videos* is a list of items with little cohesion, the relationship 'statement – evidence – appeal' can be used to make sense of how the individual items on the list internally cohere. Here goes the vlogger's speech from one of the items:

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Look at the damn camera! How many times have you watched a video where someone is doing this: Watching themselves on the damn monitor [*Illustrates by performing as a vlogger looking off*]. How distracting is that? When people watch these kinds of videos they want feel like you're talking to them [...]. It's isolating. You don't feel like you're being talked to. You feel like you're spying on someone talking to themselves. It's uncomfortable.

The rant begins with an appeal about what to do. The statement that a constant stare off at the monitor is “distracting,” and “isolating” and makes viewers feel “uncomfortable” follows. The evidence to support the statement is implied or provided by the illustrative performance. The order of the functional parts of the rhetorical structure is thus inverted in this example.

Even if YouTube video culture itself is the standard of forming categories in this study, it would not be convincing to refer to the text-type of a video uploaded by the vloggers of the corpus as pronounced argument. With the increase of political uses of YouTube, however, such videos appeared on the platform. In 2007 the video *10 questions that every intelligent Christian must answer* was uploaded by the user GIIVIDEO who represented a small atheist organization. In the video the user devises a fairly elaborate argument to convince “intelligent Christians” that God is imaginary. He sets out by asking questions like “Why Won't God Heal Amputees?” For each of these questions he points out that an answer starting from the assumption that God exists is “nonsense,” answers such as: “God must have some kind of special plan for amputees.” Answers starting with the assumption that God is imaginary, however, are presented as making sense in the argument: “Because God is imaginary, and he doesn't answer any prayers. Every ‘answered prayer’ is actually a coincidence.” The video was very successful and controversial on YouTube: It was viewed 6.6 million times and received an exceptional 1.4 million comments.

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Musical form

In the chapter about editing, a mode of editing in which graphical, rhythmical, spatial and temporal relationships between shots can primarily be felt via their relationship to the music was referred to as illustration editing. Not only because of the organization of the images in terms of the music, but also because the recording itself is a part of the eventual music video, the structure and mode of coherence of a music video (and of a musical performance video) is vastly influenced by the structure and coherence of the music.

Using BROOKERS' *Butterfly* as an example, this section seeks to illustrate the large-scale musical structure and coherence of such videos. The table below lists elements on the sound and image tracks and proposes terms to name the structural parts of the overall video, that is, sound and image track together. I suggest that the musical functions of the different musical parts with reference to each other make the parts of the music video in general cohere. BROOKERS'S *Butterfly* is special, nevertheless, because the 'actual' music video is preceded, interrupted, and followed by narrative non-music video material which tells of the video's production, and by a closing title sequence. Thus not all parts of the overall video receive 'musical' names.

Section of video	Elements on sound track	Bars	Elements on image track	Time
Frame narrative: beginning	Diegetic sound		Brooke, Melissa, and Ben bored in front of the television. Brooke has the idea to make a video.	0:00
Intro	Ambient synth intro	4	Countdown (animated title cards)	1:20
	½ chorus with reduced instrumentation	4	Video title (animated title card)	
	2 lead synth patterns with full instrumentation	8	Introduction of the three performers (camera images with superimposed titles)	

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Verse 1	Verse 1	8	Brooke, Melissa, and Ben, alone or together, at various activities that respond to the music: dancing, mock-playing instruments, gesturing, sliding on a playground.	1:45
Chorus 1	Chorus	8	"	1:57
	Post-chorus	8	"	
Frame narrative: middle	Diegetic sound: Brooke and Melissa		Brooke convinces Melissa to participate in shooting the video.	2:23
Chorus 2	Chorus	8	Brooke, Melissa, and Ben, alone or together, at various activities that respond to the music.	2:46
	Chorus	8	"	
	Post-chorus	8	"	
Bridge	Bridge part a	8	Melissa dancing on a mat and Brooke dancing around her.	3:23
	Bridge part b	4	"	
Chorus 3	Chorus	8	"	3:41
	½ chorus with reduced instrumentation	4	"	
	Chorus transposed	8	Ben dancing on a mat and Brooke dancing around her.	
Outro	2 lead synth patterns with full instrumentation	8	"	4:11
	2 lead synth patterns with reduced instrumentation	8	Brooke, Ben, and Melissa approach camera. Animated title card: "Fin."	

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Frame narrative: ending	Diegetic sound		Brooke, Melissa, and Ben watching television: “What in the world did we just watch?”	4:41
Closing title sequence	Diegetic sound. Closing title theme fades in		Discarded take: watching television	4:57
	Closing title theme		Closing credits	
	Closing title theme/Diegetic sound		Discarded take: Brooke in cardboard box	
	Closing title theme/Diegetic sound		Discarded take: playing instruments on play-ground	- 6:36

Table 6.1.1 Musical form of the BROOKERS video *Butterfly*.

It is interesting to see how the non-music video material relates to the music video material in *Butterfly*. It offers a narration about the production of the ‘actual’ music video. In the very first shot of *Butterfly* the three teenagers are sitting in front of the television when they chance upon the original music for the smile.dk record; we can hear some of the recording as diegetic sound from the television set. Brooke has the idea of producing a video and wakes up her friend Ben (Fig. 6.1.10). The beginning of the frame narrative corresponds with another shot of the three of them in front of the television that is shown after the ‘actual’ music video has ended (Fig. 6.1.19). In a mixture of shock and disbelief they wonder: “What in the world did we just watch?” It is not clear if the teenagers watched the original video or, like their YouTube viewers, the video they produced. Interestingly, Melissa is wearing the funny hat that she is also wearing in the music video. Like in an eye line match (Bordwell and Thompson 314) we see people looking at something first, in the next shot what they are looking at, and finally their reaction. This narrative editing convention is what links the beginning and ending of the frame narrative and the actual music video in *Butterfly*.

Other non-music video material – a shot in which Brooke ‘convinces’ Melissa to participate (Fig. 5.1.7) – replaces the second verse of “Butterfly”; that is, the second verse of the record cannot be heard and is not illustrated in the music video *Butterfly*. This scene is followed by

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the second chorus which is illustrated by footage of assorted activities again.

The closing title sequence of the overall video is long and consists of discarded takes and animated title cards listing credits. The images are accompanied by an unnamed non-diegetic pop song mixed with the diegetic audio of the discarded takes.



6.1.10 Beginning of the frame narrative. Three bored teenagers and an idea: Producing a music video for smile.dk's "Butterfly".



6.1.11-16 Frames from the intro of the 'actual' music video: A wipe replaces the trio on the sofa with an animated countdown, a card showing the title, and the introduction of the performers as a group and individually.

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6.1.17-18 The outro section of the music video.



6.1.19 “What in the world did we just watch?” The ending of the frame narrative.

Inserts

An element in a video that notably differs from the other elements can be called an insert. Vloggers created inserts during all stages of production using various techniques. There is an overall ‘insertiness’ that may be characteristic of videos on vlogs. Only a few inserts stick out as incoherent elements though: Most inserts bear a functional relationship with reference to the other elements, the video at large, or the video’s context. As a part of this chapter’s endeavor of understanding videos’ form, I introduce the most-common kinds of inserts in terms of their function here.

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It is actually hard to find truly incoherent inserts. Vloggers sometimes digressed during their profilmic presentation, but this typically fulfilled one of several functions, as will be shown below. Most non-functional digressions were probably edited out. In *First Videoblog* Melody Oliveria holds her shoes up and begins reading out the inscriptions her classmates made. Reading out the inscriptions probably constituted an incoherent element in the context of the video project of giving an account of her day. Oliveria appears to have noticed the incoherence during postproduction and applied a software effect that increased the speed of presentation and also the pitch of her voice. Like editing out, this seems to be a way of ‘fixing’ an incoherent digression. The funny voice created through the effect added a surplus that compensated for the digression.



6.1.20-21 “Let’s say there are five girls, and this is me, in a bar or a club: ‘Hey ladies, how is it going?’ ” The girls, represented by five fingers, run off, screaming.

Many elements in videos that stick out as inserts in terms of content and form provide evidence, an example, or illustration. This is particularly the case in subject clips. In *Internet Recognition* Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) switches to a different mode of performance to provide illustrations several times in the video. Using the fingers of both hands to impersonate a group of girls and himself “in a bar or club,” he gives an impression of his – typically unsuccessful – socializing with girls in “real life” (6.1.20-21). While this is an insert because of the different modes of performance, it integrates into the video and does not interrupt the overall flow. It makes sense, may even be necessary, to provide an illustration here. In his tutorials Nate Burr illustrates or provides

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examples of ways of becoming popular and improving one's videos respectively. There are illustrative performances for lip syncing and home dancing which are 'inserty' because the vlogger changes his position in the room, switches modes of performance, uses a different framing, edits the footage as discrete shots, and accompanies images by non-diegetic music.

Several inserts function to add narrative complexity, such as the flash-forward in *Renetto goes TANNING* (Fig. 5.2.34-36) and the shot of Brooke's successful attempt of 'hiring' her sister that substitutes the second verse of the musical recording in *Butterfly* (Fig. 5.1.7). Tony Huynh in particular occasionally switches to a meta level and comments on his 'actual' presentation, which creates another kind of insert. To illustrate how he feels about receiving female attention, he rapidly moves his hands up and down while saying: "It's just so weird" (Fig. 2.1.6). Probably noticing his funny looks on the control screen, he digresses to a meta level: "Yes, apparently that's my actions for weirdness. It's like half the robot – not the actual robot [*moves his arms like an 'actual' robot*] – like half of it. Weird! Weird! Danger! Danger! Now I'm just going crazy." In the next shot he is on track again: "It's just really weird, alright? The attention I'm getting from girls." He did not discard the footage of the digression but merely trimmed it. The digression provides a meta level to the 'actual' presentation and thus adds to the overall richness of the video.

References to other YouTube users, their videos, or to YouTube visitors that stick out as 'inserty' can be found in several videos. Nate Burr names a number of vloggers whose work he recommends in *Vblog - how to be popular on YouTube*, and also addresses some of them: "Morbeck, genius stuff!" Melody Oliveria uses a title card in *First Videoblog* to give a message to her boyfriend: "I love you Aaron!!!!!" (Fig. 2.4.14). Paul Robinett quotes GERIATRIC1927 by diegetically playing audio from one of his videos in *This Is YouTube at its best!*.

The producers of LONELYGIRL15 recognized the typicality of inserts in video blogging and included two inserts in *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*. A freeze frame accompanied by non-diegetic theme music from *Psycho* is preceded by the following line: "I don't wanna tell you were I live, because you could like stalk me." Similar to the above-mentioned examples, this element appears 'inserty' because of the divergent use of audiovisual techniques compared to material that precedes and follows it. Nevertheless, it is also a functional element with regards to the overall video because it illustrates Bree's fears of being stalked. A montage sequence of Bree making grimaces which is

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accompanied by other non-diegetic music constitutes another insert in the same LONELYGIRL15 video. Like several video bloggers from the corpus, Bree shows off a 'skill' in this insert. In terms of the fictional production within the unacknowledged frame, this insert was not functional. From the perspective of the framing production, it was probably meant to affirm the "dorkiness" of Bree and to make her sympathetic to viewers.

Duration

I suggest that the duration of vloggers' videos at once depended on an emerging notion of an appropriate duration for a YouTube video and on the requirements of specific video projects.

I calculated the mean and median durations of 26 videos that have been discussed in various places in this study. The non-music videos were slightly longer than the music videos. In each group the median was lower than the mean which indicates that there was a small number of videos that were significantly longer than the majority thus 'pushing' the mean values.

	Non-music videos	Music videos	Total
Number	21	5	26
Mean duration	4:33	3:55	4:26
Median duration	4:11	3:20	3:22

Table 6.1.2 Duration of videos

Geert Lovink surmises that the "brevity" of YouTube videos is consistent with the "meagre concentration people can muster for the average media product" at the beginning of the 21st century, and that "what we are consuming with online video is our own lack of time" ("The Art of Watching Databases" 12). However, if we regard YouTube videos as short really depends on what we compare them to. The mean duration of videos on vlogs is similar to that of pop records and their music videos, of certain kinds of comedic sketches on television, and of some television newscasts. These formats also informed vloggers in terms of content, technique, and various parameters of form – probably more

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than feature films or longer television formats like episodes of sitcoms and soap operas. These short formats have been around for a long time of course. Thus the duration of the videos from the most successful video blogs on YouTube in 2005 and 2006 does not indicate a shift towards shorter duration or an acceleration of media experience.

Suppose it was true that only click numbers mattered, that “attention spans” were becoming “shorter and shorter” (Sherman 163), that YouTube was about “brief peaks” (Lovink 11), that “we already kn[e]w the message in advance” or found out “within a few seconds” (12), and that viewers “immediately turn[ed] to something else” if they did not like a video (10). Why then, did vloggers with videos averaging at 4:26 become successful on YouTube? Why did they ‘waste’ time on anything beyond minute 1? Why did these vloggers not produce masses of increasingly shorter videos? Why did they bother creating videos with an overall form – beginning, middle, and ending – at all, instead of videos that simply presented the “message” in a sentence? Lovink’s polemics cannot be hitting the right spot.

Melody Oliveria’s public diary clips average at about 3 minutes. She presents the most-important events of her day in a duration that is not significantly shorter or longer than the average. That is, she presents these events in terms of an emerging standard. Her music videos *Changes* (3:35) and *Little Wonder* (5:58) are roughly as long as the respective David Bowie records. Interestingly, there are a couple of videos that are a lot shorter and this seems to be because of the nature of the respective video projects. *Weird arms*, for example, lasts only 0:27; it is long enough to illustrate her skill and to call for responses. *Weather* is another brief video in which she shows her viewers what the weather is like with a shot through the window and says what she thinks about it.

SMOSH produced videos that were rarely significantly shorter or longer than the average. This is true for their non-music and their music videos. The theme songs used in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* and *Transformers Theme* are brief, 1:00 and 0:31 respectively, which is no surprise taking into account that these stem from animated television series for children. It is interesting to see that in each case – besides illustrating the actual theme song – SMOSH produced further material to arrive at a duration of 3:05 and 3:01, which was closer to the average duration of a pop music video, their other videos, and those of other vloggers. Video duration is one of the topics covered in YouTube tutorials – and the typical advice tends to be to take care that a video does not get too long (qtd. in Müller, “Discourses on the Art of

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Making a YouTube Video” 131, 134). A common technique of vloggers was to shorten videos through jump cut editing. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that, at least in the case of SMOSH, there was material that was felt to be too short to become a self-contained artifact for YouTube distribution and that was in need for extension.

Most of RENETTO’s videos are also within the range of other YouTube videos, between 2 and 5 minutes. However, there are several videos that are significantly longer. In *How to become SELF UNEMPLOYED* (14:27) and *Renetto... The Rambling Story of My Life. So Far...* (1:09:38) the ‘epic’ duration seems to be making a point of its own: It seems to add gravity to these autobiographical videos. This did not hinder the vlogger from creating very short videos thereafter; *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment* and “*Secret Love Song*” to my sick Wife... are 1:20 and 1:48 respectively.

In general, there seems to be a largely unarticulated notion of an appropriate duration for a YouTube video already in 2005 and 2006. This can be inferred from the attempts of some vloggers of keeping it short and of SMOSH of increasing the duration of two videos. The notion of an appropriate duration is articulated in some tutorials (qtd. in Müller, “Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video” 131). Interestingly, neither Burr nor Morbeck make remarks in this regard in their tutorials. Burr puts an emphasis on content: “The most important thing when making a video is to have something to talk about. Otherwise its just you sitting in front of the camera talking about boring-ass crap.” The advice about deleting pauses and fillers follows and seems to be secondary. More prominent than the notion of an appropriate duration seems to have been an understanding that duration depended on the video project in question. This can be inferred from the ease with which vloggers produced comparatively short and long videos if the nature of a project demanded it.

6.2 The Form of All the Videos on a Channel

Now that the form of individual videos has been analyzed, we may dare a glance at all the videos released on channels of the corpus over time. The question of the unity and coherence of the videos on a channel can be asked with regards to most aspects in view in this study: producers and performers, modes of production, video projects and objects, kinds of videos, settings, the use of the body, performances, cinematography, editing, and other audiovisual techniques, the overall form of individual videos over time, and their distribution and exhibition. Because this question has been addressed to a certain extent in the respective chapters themselves, this chapter only recapitulates the most important points and fleshes out the relationship between video projects and objects of videos.

In the context of this question several issues converge:

- vloggers' ongoing and changing creative and other interests,
- conceptual considerations (e.g. planning a number of related videos together),
- skills and material constraints (e.g. the availability of different settings),
- the popularity of specific videos with viewers,
- brand building,
- the creation of variety for vloggers themselves and for their viewers,
- the emerging conventions of video blogging,
- stylistic differentiation with regards to other vloggers.

During the exploratory analysis for corpus formation I found that the videos uploaded to the vast majority of the most subscribed channels of 2005 and 2006 shared a small number of traits. The most important of these traits was the appearance of the user or of a fictional user character who claimed to be producing the videos in the videos themselves. Accordingly, it is no surprise that the appearance and reappearance of the user (or fictional user character) in the videos is the prime element that links the videos released on a channel. The user was a producer, performer, 'piece of content' and origin of content,

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formal element,⁷⁹ and brand element in video blogging. Viewers subscribed to a user's (or fictional user's) channel and could depend on her or his visibility and audibility in the audiovisual material of future videos.

Another result of the exploratory analysis was that a given vlogger typically uploaded videos of several kinds to her or his channel. The recognition that a vlogger typically produced videos of different kinds and specialized in a few or in a single kind implies that there were differences and similarities in terms of kinds of videos and all attributes of content and form that constituted a kind of video.

The pursuit of specific video projects with single objects in the majority of videos on vlogs (chapters 2.2 and 6.1) begs the question for the extent and quality of relationships between videos with regards to projects and objects: To what extent and in which ways were video projects and objects of different videos related to or depending on each other?

No specific relationship between projects and objects of videos

Because vloggers specialized in one or a few kinds of videos, general similarities between the video projects and objects of different videos – whether they were released in sequence or not – are no surprise. The project 'behind' every music video was the illustration of a musical recording, for example; and the project of every subject clip to speak about a topic in some way.

However, if we look at the videos released on a video blog together, there typically is not a more specific relationship between the video projects and objects of one video and another, even if the videos are of the same kind. The musical recordings that Brodack used for her music videos uploaded from October to December 2005, for example, are diverse, ranging from musical (*Cell block Tango*), to cheesy Eurodance (*Butterfly, CRAZED NUMA FAN !!!!*), to Christmas pop (*All i want for christmas*). Hecox/Padilla's (SMOSH) sketches thrive on disparate comic situations, premises, or characters. Most of Nate Burr's

⁷⁹ The implications of the reappearing user with regards to videos' form are probably not intuitive: Graphic continuities were effected in the images (shape, color, movement, etc.; see Bordwell and Thompson 297). Among the continuities of sound, hearing the same voice again and again was the most important one.

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(BLUNTY3000) subject clips discuss specific topics which do not occur again. Vloggers typically speak of video projects in singular as in “when making a video” or “have a new video coming up.”⁸⁰ Once a video had been made, uploaded, and viewed, they thought about a new, discrete, and – indeed – about a different video project.

The formally discrete identity of most videos made me format the titles of videos in italics in this study, as it is common for other discrete works like novels, and feature and documentary films. In most cases a video on a vlog did not appear to be in analogy with the episode of a television series, which would have made normal type and quotes advisable.

Related video projects and objects

Sometimes, however, vloggers created a video that bore an explicit relationship with a previously released video: a video that was contextualized as a follow-up or reaction. Typically, viewers’ reactions in comments, video responses, and private messages were ‘in between’ the two videos. The video projects and objects of the two videos could be related in different ways.

An element from a video as the object of another

Tony Huynh’s *Hand Gestures* reacted to his previous *Internet Recognition* and the feedback it generated. At the beginning of the video, the vlogger briefly rants about YouTube featuring the previous video which further increased his YouTube fame. In *Internet Recognition* he had illustrated the “weirdness” of female attention on YouTube by chopping with his hands (Fig. 2.1.6). The vlogger of PAYTOTHEORDEROFOFOF2 used the gesture in one of her own videos afterwards. In *Hand Gestures* Tony Huynh quotes audiovisual material from his own and from the video of the other vlogger before introducing the current video’s topic that is also mentioned in the title: “Let’s talk about hand gestures, people. I’m a big fan of hand gestures.” The relationship between the objects of these two subject clips is that of an individual element of the old video (i.e. a hand gesture) becoming the object of the new, a relationship we could call metonymic.

⁸⁰ BLUNTY3000, *How to make better Videos!*; and MORBECK, *YouTube Don’ts*.

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Melody Oliveria's *Breakup* and *My Webcam* are also metonymically linked. The vlogger says at the beginning of the latter video: "People have been asking about my camera and have been wanting to know what other things it can do, so I might as well make a video showing." The visual effects the webcam's software could generate were first used in *Breakup* but not the focus of the video. The technology became the object of another new video. Unlike in the case of the THEWINEKONE videos, other videos were released in between.

A video as an element in another

From a different perspective, *Internet Recognition* is a video that 'became' an element in the follow-up *Hand Gestures* because the whole video was referred to at the beginning. This relationship was in fact common in the corpus – including the 'videomaking' of fictional vlogger characters. In Morbeck's *I was abused by Filthy Whore* Chipmunk Chick says that she flew to Canada to coproduce a video with the vlogger of FILTHYWHORE – a trip that ended with her waking up in the gutters because the other vlogger administered knock-out drops to her. At the beginning of *Tea with Nornna* Chipmunk Chick briefly refers to 'her' previous video and says that she went to the doctor who confirmed that she had not been raped after all. The object of the video itself is having a cup of tea and a conversation with the vlogger of NORRNA (impersonated by Morbeck), i.e. an object distinct from that of the previous video.

A video as the object of another

At the beginning of *Diet Coke + Mentos = ... What really Happened?* Paul Robinett and his friend Dave apologize for their previous video and for making viewers worry about Paul's condition (Fig. 6.2.1). In *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment* Paul's stomach exploded after eating Mentos and drinking Diet Coke. In *What really Happened?* Paul says he wants to show how the two of them conducted the experiment and that "Nothing happened at all." Towards the end of the repetition of the experiment the vlogger says: "Everything's fine. I'm perfectly okay" – before his stomach explodes again, which concludes the video (Fig. 6.2.2). The new video added a meta-level to the old one and included

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a repetition with a variation of the old one. The old video became the single object of the new video.⁸¹



6.2.1-2 “I want to apologize. Dave wants to apologize. That will never happen again.”

Videos with the same object

Nate Burr’s introduction, two-part incineration, and obituary for his customized laptop would be an example of four videos that have the same object. The project of the first video was to introduce the computer, the customizations in particular (*The Blunt-Top*). The project of documenting its incineration actually ‘lasted’ two videos (*Blunt-Top Destruction Part 1* and *Blunt-Top Destruction Part 2*). The project and object of each of these two videos were the same. These are rare cases of videos that did not have a beginning, middle, and ending structure on their own. The project of the fourth video was to commemorate the computer with assorted footage of the customization and incineration. The vlogger obviously devised these videos together.

A contest was the object of several pairs of successive videos uploaded by Morbeck in summer 2006. In the first video of each pair

⁸¹ Unlike Pedro Morbeck in *I was abused by Filthy Whore*, Paul Robinett and his friends are not enacting fictional characters but enacting themselves in this video. However, frictions between the levels of production and narration are conspicuous here as well: Paul and Dave constructed a fictional story about themselves conducting (and repeating) an experiment that goes wrong. The configuration of a video becoming the object of another describes the relationship between the two videos on both levels.

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Morbeck (performing as Chipmunk Chick or as himself) asked viewers to submit videos to a contest; in the second video he announced the winners (see p. 326 in detail).

Videos with similar projects and objects

Some vloggers created formats that they used to produce a number of videos. The projects and objects of these videos were discrete but similar. Every fall since 2006, Hecox and Padilla (SMOSH) have created and released a *Food Battle* video. Already *Food Battle 2006* bore a year in its title which suggests that the vloggers thought that the format could be reused on an annual basis (see Internet Archive, 9 Dec. 2006).



6.2.3-4 *Food Battle 2006*: Padilla fails to use taquitos, Hecox 'succeeds' to use donuts as socks.

In each installment, the vloggers conduct a tongue-in-cheek contest trying to find out which of two kinds of food is superior. Donuts and taquitos were used for *Food Battle 2006*. The middle part of each video consists of a list of challenges, like trying to use the food as a plunger, telescope, or socks. A challenge begins with the vloggers choosing an item from a shopping catalogue. Padilla and Hecox then try to use the food as the respective item. The audiovisual narrative agency decides who wins the challenge by displaying a "v" or "x" title card (Figs. 6.2.3-4). At the end of the list of challenges, an overall winner – food and vlogger – is announced. At the beginning of next year's video, the loser asks the winner for a rematch with a new kind of food.

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This format can be reused virtually forever choosing different kinds of food and challenges in each installment. The popularity of the videos – they typically receive twice as many views as other SMOSH videos – suggests that viewers have not grown tired of the format yet. The project of the first video was ‘to create a video of a food battle involving donuts and taquitos.’ The object was the respective food. The project and object of the next year’s video were, obviously, very similar but not the same. The food battle is very much a protocol that can be ‘executed’ with different objects.

During the first months of the LONELYGIRL15 project, a *Proving Science Wrong* video was uploaded now and then: a video in which Bree tongue-in-cheek ‘proved’ that a theory of popular science, such as the Anna Karenina principle, was wrong (*The Tolstoy Principle (and Dad talks to Daniel)*).

Narrative continuity

The issue of narrative video-to-video continuity – that is, of the ongoing narration of the same story in different videos – is not the same as that of the relationship between video projects and objects, but in the absence of a better place it will be addressed here.

In a public diary clip the events of a day are the basic story unit that is (orally) narrated in a video and constitute the video’s single object. In a narrative self/world documentary a self-contained activity – such as an excursion to a local forest (*The Delaware Boy*) or a visit to a tanning studio – is (audiovisually) narrated and can be seen as the single object. In most of the latter videos, the activity can even be described as a “single piece of action and the whole of it” in Aristotle’s terms (section 1451a).

If we trace a vlog on which documentary narrative videos were common over time, we can discern an ongoing ‘story’ of some sort. In the videos of Melody Oliveria and Tony Huynh, viewers get to know that they are going to high school (*Before school*) and university (*Campus Tour: EIT*) respectively, and at some point of their graduations (*Welly Welly Welly Welly Well* and *Congraduations*). Nevertheless, going to school/university and graduating are narrated as small story bits with the duration of a single or a couple of days, or as single activities. THEWINEKONE’s *Congraduations*, for example, is concerned with the events of the day of the graduation ceremony and not with the graduation as the culmination of a tertiary education that lasted several

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years. Oliveria and Huynh did not devise a narrative arc with increasing tension that would be released at their graduations.

During the first months of the LONELYGIRL15 project, the basic story unit narrated in a video on LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST were also the events of a single or of a couple of days in a public diary clip, and a self-contained activity in a self/world documentary. Some events were announced in one video and took place in another (e.g. the hiking trip), but no narrative arc that spanned more than three videos was created.

To some extent this changed in early September 2006 – a few days before the project was uncovered – when Bree announced in the video *A Change in My Life* that she would have to go through a ceremony. The ceremony was referred to in several of Bree's and Daniel's videos during the next couple of weeks. It was secretly 'documented' by Daniel in *The Ceremony*.

Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent the trio running the channels devised events of more than a couple of weeks story time, because there were no cues in the videos that became meaningful only a long time afterwards, or events alluded to that only took place after a longer period. The producers probably took what had happened before as the starting point for writing the next couple of days or weeks worth of story.

What is more important, the story of Bree and Daniel (and further characters) was still narrated in the form of public diary clips and self/world documentaries with story bits that 'fit' with the short format and that had a beginning, middle, and ending. *Christmas Surprise*, for example, at once narrated the reunion of Daniel and Bree (i.e. a piece of an ongoing story) and their Christmas celebrations (the events of a single day) (Figs. 5.1.17-18). The producers also continued to create self-contained narrative videos for which the ongoing mystery story only served as a background. In *Date With P. Monkey* Bree 'documents' a trip to the movies with her hand puppet. The wider context of this activity – being on the run from *The Order* – is only referred to once in the video. Using the idea of unacknowledged fictional vlogs as constructed video blogs within an unacknowledged frame, we could say that in spite of the narration of an ongoing story on LONELYGIRL15 and related channels, the producers still made their characters pursue discrete video projects with single objects in the fictional situation of production within the framing situation of production.

A detailed analysis of narrative on LONELYGIRL15 and related channels would require a lot more space than can be provided here, taking into account that LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST are only two of many

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channels in the corpus. Markus Kuhn offers such an analysis, of the ongoing introduction of new characters during the first season of the project in particular (“YouTube als Loopingbahn” 129–130).

If video projects and objects of the videos on a regular vlog were related, the same, or similar, this usually involved a small number of videos. More often than not, vloggers’ videos were not part of larger ‘wholes.’ Narrative videos – documentary or fictional – were common on several regular vlogs. Video-to-video continuity, however, was not very strong. So how to conceptualize the form of the lot of the videos created and uploaded by a vlogger to her/his channel?

The consistent element that linked all the videos released on a regular video blog was the person who ran the channel, created and uploaded the videos, and appeared in the videos themselves. Showing one’s videos was a prime motivation of these people for using YouTube. Accordingly, I suggest to understand the lot of the uploaded videos simply as a public presentation of a segment of their audiovisual work or oeuvre. ‘Work’ is meant in a strictly unemphatic sense here. What happened between the first and last video of such a segment of a vlogger’s work? Skills improved, in many cases also production values. Creative and other interests changed or consolidated; the creation of videos itself became more or less important. The viewer base grew or shrunk (see 7 Showing the Videos, p. 310).

Within the real frame of production hidden from viewers’ eyes, the videos on unacknowledged fictional video blogs can be seen as a segment of the ‘work’ of the fictional vlogger characters. On the level of their production, the videos on LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST constitute a fictional narrative video series – a serial or “Fortsetzungsserie” to be precise (Ruchatz 81) – and an exception within early YouTube culture.

Conclusion: Use of Audiovisual Techniques and Form of Videos

Building on the analysis of stages of production and the recognition that video blogging can be seen as an audiovisual practice (chapter 2), chapter 5 explored the use of audiovisual techniques, focusing on cinematography and editing, and chapter 6 the overall form of videos. Like their use of settings and performance, vloggers' use of audiovisual techniques and the form of their videos depended on specific video projects they were pursuing.

The vloggers of the corpus began their YouTube activities starting from various levels of experience in audiovisual production. It is safe to assume that all of them – including those without practical experience – had been exposed to various kinds of audiovisual artifacts before and intuitively 'knew' all sorts of conventions (see also Müller, "Discourses on the Art of Making a YouTube Video" 137). It is also safe to assume that all of them – including those with previous experience – learned while producing videos for the platform: They learned about conventions from elsewhere and about video blogging conventions during their very emergence. Vloggers without previous practical experience learned about some of the inherent capacities of all audiovisual media, such as the control of the frame over onscreen and offscreen space and the powers of cutting and reassembling continuous pieces of footage. They recognized the potential of audiovisual techniques to realize wildly different video projects, probably like the pioneers of early cinema and generations of directors and other people working with audiovisual media afterwards.

Generalizing conceptualizations of YouTube videomaking either in terms of industry or everyday creativity and conventions neither offer an understanding of the distinctiveness of YouTube videomaking nor of its complex relationships with other practices.

Some conventions of form are of a very general kind and ask us to situate videos on vlogs in a long history of other formations of cultural artifacts. Dedicating videos to single objects and creating a large-scale structure of beginning, middle, and ending are such conventions, leading back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. YouTube forced users to supply videos with titles, but the ease with which vloggers accepted this demand and the ways in which they employed titles to affirm the unity of their videos and to guide viewers is another indication of the identity of

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videos on vlogs as cultural and (more specifically) audiovisual artifacts – and not as bits of conversation between people.⁸²

Asking for the cultural practices and formations from which video bloggers borrowed devices leads to a list on which television newscasts, text blogs, television sketch comedy, music video, autobiographical documentary, and spoken presentations (e.g. in school or the wider public) hold prominent positions.

In video blogging, formations from elsewhere were transformed or reassembled into specific YouTube kinds of videos. The subject clip, for example, was a YouTube kind of video in which newscasts, text blogging, and spoken presentations came together, were mediated by the body of the vlogger, and spiced with the fervor that was genuine of some segments of web culture. In subject clips the static cinematography of newscasts met jump cut editing. A descriptive or an argumentative text-type could prevail; the overall structure could be a list in the former and a casual argument in the latter case; newscasts or commentary would stick out as related formations respectively. Lip sync and home dance music videos were structurally distinct from industry music videos because of the visual absence of the pop star associated with the record. Sketch comedy on YouTube is probably the kind of video that is the least distinct from other formations, television sketch comedy in particular.

On the levels of all audiovisual techniques and on the level of overall form individual and collective inventions can be found. Morbeck's use of elaborate costume and make up and a pitch-shifting sound effect to play characters of the opposite sex seems to be what he came up with, became successful with, and was known for on YouTube. The cinematography of scarcity was a broad sort of camerawork that can be regarded as a development of early video bloggers. In this cinematography, static and mobile framing and camera distance depended on the number of people involved in the production. It became emblematic of video blogging and continued to be used on successful video blogs

⁸² The compulsory title function itself appears to predispose uses of YouTube for showing cultural artifacts. Films, works of literature, works of visual art and popular music typically have titles. Most kinds of communication between people – conversations in person, phone calls and video phone calls, and letters – do not have titles. Emails and business letters can have subject lines – not all have though – but subject lines are something altogether different from titles.

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'after' scarcity; it was also appropriated on unacknowledged fictional vlogs. Editing material out from longer pieces of footage to deal with profilmic accidents or to keep it short and to achieve visual variety at the same time was not an invention of vloggers. However, the creation of jump cuts in static footage of a single speaking performer makes YouTube jump cut editing stand out. The presence of various sorts of inserts – most of them fulfilling specific functions for the video – within an ongoing structure of beginning, middle, and ending are characteristic of videos on vlogs. Ultimately, video blogging on YouTube deserves to be regarded as an audiovisual practice with its own conventions, consistencies of content and form, and – as we will see in the next chapter – distribution and exhibition.

The video blogs of the corpus give evidence of the fact that vloggers developed individual routines and styles and that they branded their channels for viewers. Every technique could serve for the development of style. Anthony Padilla's bedroom became an element of content and form that distinguished SMOSH videos to the extent that Hecox and Padilla played with viewers' expectations in this regard in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* (p. 139). As early successful and thus highly visible vloggers, they were probably also responsible for the proliferation of the bedroom setting within the emerging practice. Signature greetings were used by several vloggers to brand their channels. Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) became known for – and reflected on – the use of his hands to gesture and to move otherwise. Morbeck's cross-gender acting has already been mentioned. Jump cut editing was associated with THEWINEKONE in particular and spread to other channels. A very common tool to brand one's videos were opening and closing title sequences. Treating the creative associations of style and the marketing associations of branding together is meant to suggest that they, in fact, belong together in video blogging. Vloggers' bodies were the stylistic and brand element with the highest degree of continuity – an element that the practice hinged on.

With reference to the argument that content is more important than form in YouTube videos (Sherman 163), the most basic and fundamental insight of chapter 6 was that form mattered in video blogging. In spite of the absence of limitations in this regard, video bloggers uploaded videos with a distinct overall form that was created in support of the video projects they were pursuing. It was impossible to find a video on a successful video blog that was altogether incoherent or without form on a small or large-scale level: All videos displayed symptoms of people giving form to the material they decided to upload. Video blog-

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gers gave form to their videos through choices about profilmic space and events, cinematography, editing, titles, and other techniques. Various examples have been provided for vloggers' awareness of how the overall form of a video impacted the way the video would work.

In Roman Marek's *Understanding YouTube* an individual YouTube video is largely regarded as a mere stage in a succession of clonings and transformations created and uploaded by different users (82, 140, 257). An important insight from the study of videos' form in this regard was that vloggers created discrete cultural artifacts: artifacts which were dedicated to single and specific objects and that had a beginning, middle, and ending. Videos on vlogs were not mere intersections in a network of references or segments in a textual continuum that began and ended nowhere.

There was a decisive specific moment when a video was uploaded to the platform and became a public cultural artifact. This moment was related to a vlogger's decision that a video was finished and supplied with a title. In the 'biography' of YouTube videos we have reached that moment now. So what happened to YouTube videos once uploaded to the platform?

7 Showing the Videos

“and then show it to the world.”

(THEWINEKONE, *3:00 AM Madness*)

I already illustrated that showing one’s videos was a motivation for using YouTube for early YouTube users with and without a background in audiovisual production or related areas (chapter 2.1). This final chapter aims to study just how this showing materialized: It studies the distribution and exhibition of videos. Activities of the users from the corpus – video bloggers and the users running unacknowledged fictional vlogs – and of other YouTube users and visitors who watched, commented on, or posted video responses to their videos will be in view.

The analysis and the arguments put forward here are responding to the prominent participatory culture and social media arguments within YouTube studies (see chapter 1.1). In contrast with Burgess/Green and others, I suggest that production, distribution, exhibition, and viewership are useful terms to make sense of YouTube because – unlike the concept of a “continuum of cultural participation” (*YouTube* 57) – they are descriptive of the reality of how the platform was configured (chapter 1.2) and used (chapters 2.1 and 7). I am further suggesting that an overall conceptualization of YouTube as a social medium is not called for (chapters 1.2 and 7).

In the first part communication and associations between people that were enabled or maintained through YouTube are taken into account: YouTube was not an asocial medium. The question is if they were YouTube’s prime purposes and outcomes, distinguish YouTube from ‘regular’ media, and thus justify the emphatic label ‘social.’ The occasional use of the term ‘community’ by users of the platform is examined. I argue that the term is not descriptive of the overall social formation that emerged on YouTube but a rhetorical device fulfilling specific functions. Throughout chapter 7 it will be suggested that not a user community but a hierarchical social structure emerged on YouTube, characterized by a high degree of individuation, competition, and antagonism.

In the second part the overall system in which users and videos were placed is studied: a competitive system of evaluations and rank-

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ings in which performance (*Leistung*) in various parameters was measured and rewarded with increased visibility on the platform (7.2).

In the third part contributing users' ways of aiming for success in this system are in view (7.3). This involves critical re-readings of activities that are commonly regarded as communicative, of referring to other users or their videos in particular. I show that most of such references go 'up' the rankings and that many are best described as maneuvers of 'tapping' other users' viewer bases.

The much neglected field of users' monetization of their videos in the time before YouTube introduced advertising revenue sharing in 2007 is the focus of the fourth part (7.4).

The final part investigates the actual extent of response to YouTube videos and of reciprocal activity between users. What happens if we put the arguments about "inter-creative" participants (Burgess and Green 54) on a "continuum of cultural participation" (57), communication and social networking via videos, and about a community of users to the test and ask how they "bear out empirically" (Lange, "(Mis)conceptions" 87) and do indeed ask for "numbers of comments and video responses" (Burgess and Green 54)?

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Online and offline communication between people was one of the outcomes of the service YouTube. People also established and maintained associations of different qualities, degrees of depth and commitment, and duration through or because of the service. This also included communication and associations of a personal quality. Apart from playing music, personal online communication and bonding were dimensions of the YouTube activities of Amiee Jacobsen (THAUMATA), for example, if we look at her profile page archived in 2005 (see Fig. 1.2.4). The romantic relationship between the Australian vlogger of BLUNTY3000 and the American vlogger of KATZ20TWO that has previously been mentioned is an example of a 'deep' personal association formed through YouTube (p. 172). In October 2006 Peter Oakley read out a "letter" he received as a private YouTube message:

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‘Dear geriatric or Grandpa, My name is’ – and I’m not going to give it – ‘I am fifteen and I am from Singapore. I only have a grandma left as my other grandparents died before I was old enough to get to know them. I don’t normally talk much to my grandma being the silly young thing I am. You have inspired me to renew my relationship with my grandma, and I thank you for that, because I have now found out what an amazing lady she is. I have also been inspired to work at the local old-folks home just to get to know and to talk to old people.’ (*Telling it all* 23)

Oakley appears to be deeply moved by the letter. He goes on: “If this sort of thing has happened, then what a wonderful thing it is that has happened within the wonderful program of YouTube.” If, indeed, it did happen, existing offline associations improved (between the girl and her grandmother) and were formed (between the girl and the elderly people in the “old-folks home”). Also, initiated by his videos and the letter, an online affiliation between Oakley and the girl was formed, characterized by gratitude on the one side and by pride on the other. The “intergenerational communication” set off by GERIATRIC1927 has already received a lot of attention compared to channels of similar popularity (see e.g. Harley/Fitzpatrick 679; Sørenssen 144). Most likely, the friendship between Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla and the sibling relationship between Brooke Brodack and her sister Melissa deepened or achieved new qualities through their offline collaborative video production. Hecox and Padilla even merged video production and everyday life when they became housemates in 2008 (“Smosh House”).

Burgess and Green (*YouTube* 32, 54) and others (e.g. Manovich 33; van Dijck 8) use the label “social” to distinguish YouTube culture from the cultures of ‘old’ media like film and television. Nevertheless, communication and associations between people also occurred (and still occur) in these cultures. Producers, directors, screenwriters, cinematographers, agents, actors, editors, distributors, students and teachers at film schools, festival programmers, cinema owners, journalists, video retailers and renters, viewers on festivals and in regular theaters, viewers of videos/DVDs and television broadcasts communicate and associate vertically and horizontally in various ways. Of course personal communication also occurs and personal associations are also formed: People fall in love on film sets, in production companies, at film festivals and – not the least – in movie theaters. People maintain

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friendships and relationships by going to the movies. Appropriating Burgess and Green, we could say that movies – like YouTube videos – function “as a means of social networking” (26). Like the message Oakley received from the girl, most of this communication and most of these associations are not documented or public, but that does not mean that they do not exist.

The important question is if communication between people and the creation and maintenance of associations are the principal purposes or outcomes of YouTube (or of film production, distribution, exhibition, and spectatorship, for that matter). Burgess (101), Burgess/Green (26, 31, 58) and Lange (“(Mis)conceptions” 99) argue that communication and forming and maintaining such associations – referred to as social networking – are principal aims for and outcomes of using YouTube. Van Dijck’s argument in this regard also involves the purposes of YouTube – the interface, that is – during the first couple of years of the platform (114; see p. 18 in detail).

I suggest that the term social media has been employed to label disparate platforms and other services on which communication and the creation and maintenance of associations was or was not a principal purpose or outcome. For Friendster, Facebook, various chat and dating platforms, Skype, and to a certain extent also MySpace and Twitter this was certainly adequate. That these services were created to generate profits in one way or another is an issue which we can leave aside in the present discussion. In this study, I argue that the principal purposes (chapter 1.2) and outcomes (chapters 2.1 and 7) of the service YouTube were not communication and associations between people but the production, distribution, exhibition, and viewership of audiovisual artifacts.

Most and the most important interface operations for YouTube users and visitors are ill-defined as communication between people: uploading and watching videos, for example. Moreover, most of the communication and associations between people that did occur was framed by or functional for the production, distribution, exhibition, and viewership of videos. This will become clear in various places throughout chapter 7.

As the above-mentioned examples show, this does not mean that communication and associations of a personal character did not also occur. Nancy Baym interviewed a number of professional musicians who heavily used MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and other services. Her research shows that for some of these musicians associations char-

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acterized as friendship did in fact emerge – in an overall context of interaction between musicians and an audience or fans (294).

Is a distinction between ‘social networking sites’ and sites for ‘user-generated content’ the terminological solution? José van Dijck collectively refers to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia as “social media” and, in a second step, characterizes the former three as “social network sites” and the latter as sites for “user-generated content” (8). However, taking into account the manifold and complex communication between and interconnectedness of people in ‘old’ media cultures – from production to spectatorship – , I would not even refer to YouTube as a social medium in particular: Communication and associations between people are foundational for all media to work and are enabled by all media. Contrasting YouTube with previous media through the label ‘social’ works by ignoring the social character of all media, and only makes sense if we are ignoring it. Andrew Clay captures this nicely in an aside in the second *Video Vortex Reader*: “I would add that media has always been social and participatory, only mediatized in different ways” (232). Essentially, the concept social media is advertising an overall quality of all media as the characteristic quality of new media and Web 2.0 in particular. YouTube was not an asocial medium, but it could not possibly have been otherwise.

I also want to grant that an overall social formation emerged on YouTube. All offline and online settings of human culture – schools, governments, hospitals, prisons, businesses, the film and television industries, and Web 2.0 services – have a social dimension and are social formations from a certain perspective. The important question is if the social dimension or social formation is best conceived of as a community in each of these cases. As pointed out earlier (p. 17), the view of YouTube users as a community is common and a part of the social media framing of YouTube. Throughout chapter 7 I am going to show that – in the overall context of practices of showing and of watching videos – not a community but a hierarchical social structure emerged on YouTube. In the remainder of this first part, the rhetorical use of the term community will be in view.

Speaking of community

Obviously, academics were not the first to refer to YouTube or YouTube users as a community. The use of the term by users themselves is an element in Lange’s and Burgess/Green’s versions of the commu-

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nity argument (“(Mis)conceptions” 87; *YouTube* 65). I suggest that the term community, as it is used by users of the platform, is not descriptive of the social formation that emerged on YouTube but a largely rhetorical term fulfilling specific functions and should thus not be read at face value.

After one of his videos got “featured,” that is shown on YouTube’s home page, Paul Robinett “got exhausted trying” to delete all the hateful comments the video attracted. He was shocked by the “level of vulgarity and perversion” of these comments. An offline friend merely responded that he was not surprised at all. As a part of the discussion, this friend also suggested that Robinett should devote less time to his YouTube “hobby” and more time to his more ‘serious’ offline projects. In reaction to this experience, Robinett uploaded *Who are you.... Who, Who... Who, Who* in which he spoke about the argument with his friend and invited the ‘good’ users to ‘come out’ in video responses: “I believe that there is a community that is the heart of YouTube that makes it special. [...] The community of YouTube is the value of YouTube. So who is this community?” Spammers and haters are “the worst side of YouTube. What’s the best side of YouTube? Who are you people? Post a video comment!” Of the video responses the video received during the first three weeks, Robinett approved of 331 (Internet Archive, 24 Aug. 2006). Performatively, Robinett created a YouTube community through *Who are you* and the solicited responses. He also inaugurated himself as the community’s leader in the video, several follow-ups (e.g. *This Is YouTube at Its Best!*), and in interviews with journalists (e.g. McMurria; Tufnell). Robinett’s personal shock about the comments that his previous video received and the need to justify his YouTube activities to himself and his friend appear to have been initial motivations behind the address and performative creation of “the community” in *Who are you*.

While antagonism and hatred were conspicuous when watching videos and reading comments (see e.g. Strangelove 191), the putative community dimension of YouTube was not and had to be made visible in videos like *Who are you*. Similarly, positive associations between people that were created and sustained through the service were not conspicuous. The reason Peter Oakley provided for reading out the letter sent to him were also the activities of so-called ‘haters.’ A user by the name GOTHREAPER had closed her account as a result of the bullying she experienced. Oakley interrupted his autobiographical series for a video in which he read out the letter to show a different side of

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YouTube, and his vision of “the YouTube world [as] a decent place where we can all enjoy each other’s friendship and company.”

Statements about a YouTube community typically implied or stated who was not part of it. Robinett agreed with his friend that haters were “worthless human beings.” Peter Oakley called upon the hosting company to “police the thing,” that is the platform (see, related, Schröter 343).

Nevertheless, apart from those mentioned and a few other examples, I found the term ‘community’ less frequently used in videos and comments than Lange’s and Burgess/Green’s studies made me expect it: Most users never indicated that they felt as a part of a community of YouTube users, YouTubers, or video vloggers nor that there was/were such a community/such communities on YouTube.

In some of the scholarship the term community is also fulfilling a rhetorical function with regards to a conspicuously negative view of YouTube that is meant to be challenged. Burgess and Green want to counter what they perceive as “media panics” about exhibitionism, “glorified hooliganism,” “racist propaganda,” and “cyberbullying” on YouTube (18-20). They argue that “the uses of YouTube that are the subjects of these media panics are not representative of the practices of the YouTube community as a whole” – without providing examples of practices that are – but suggest that “ethical norms” are “continually being co-created, contested, and negotiated in YouTube’s social network” (20-21).

Burgess and Green also engage the conspicuous commerciality of YouTube with an interesting variant of the community argument:

It is doubtful that YouTube, Inc. ever had the aims of ‘community media’ as part of its mission to any great extent. It was always first and foremost a commercial enterprise, building an audience for advertising by enabling individual users to share video for personal and entertainment purposes. But we might suggest that it has also turned out to be a site of similar opportunities as those offered by community media, not in spite of but because of its mainstream commerciality. That is, the commercial drive behind and the hype around YouTube may have produced the possibility of participation in online video culture for a much broader range of participants than before. (76)

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A definition of community media is missing and also any evidence that YouTube was in fact offering “similar opportunities as those offered by community media.” In order to balance the conspicuous commercial reality of YouTube, a function as community media and a putative YouTube community were evoked.

What unites all uses of the term ‘community’ by users and researchers is speaking about an association of people in a positive manner: While it is never defined, the positive meaning of ‘community’ is taken for granted. There seems to be a shared understanding that community and communities are good. The discursive power of the term ‘community’ in all of its uses seems to lie in its positive meaning in contemporary American culture and in the context of the popular argument about a decline and a hopefully soon revival of community in America.⁸³ Howard Rheingold’s *Virtual Communities: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* of 1993 is an early and widely-discussed example of the argument that the Internet might in fact initiate such a revival.

Historically, community, or *Gemeinschaft*, has been characterized negatively and contrasted with a positive characterization of society, or *Gesellschaft*, by Helmuth Plessner in 1924:

Das Idol dieses Zeitalters ist die Gemeinschaft. Wie zum Ausgleich für die Härte und Schalheit unseres Lebens hat die Idee alles Süße bis zur Süßlichkeit, alle Zartheit bis zur Kraftlosigkeit, alle Nachgiebigkeit bis zur Würdelosigkeit in sich verdichtet. [...] Maßlose Erkaltung der menschlichen Beziehungen durch maschinelle, geschäftliche, politische Abstraktionen bedingt maßlosen Gegenwurf im Ideal einer glühenden, in allen ihren Trägern überquellenden Gemeinschaft. (26)⁸⁴

⁸³ See e.g. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

⁸⁴ “The idol of our age is the community. The idea condenses sweetness to sugariness, tenderness to powerlessness, flexibility to the loss of dignity to compensate for the harshness and staleness of life. [...] Human relationships grow cold as a result of technological, commercial, and political abstraction. This calls for an ideal of a glowing overflowing community.” (translation RH)

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Even though Plessner wrote about a different historical situation, his characterization and critique of ‘community’ somehow registers, because the term community on YouTube and beyond has a lot of the ‘sugariness’ that he speaks about, and it is also always meant to oppose a negatively perceived reality.

7.2 Evaluations and Rankings

This chapter describes the overall system that videos and users were placed into – and users’ situatedness in this system.

Some users were angry over the prominent exposure the company YouTube granted mainstream media stars, like Oprah Winfrey, when they joined YouTube from 2007 on (qtd. in Burgess and Green, “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 101). In this context, it is important to note that from early on heightened visibility on the platform was created as the result of performance (*Leistung*) in a competitive setting of evaluations and rankings and as the result of promotion through the company YouTube. The list of ‘Featured Videos’ on the homepage represented choices of the company and was a tool to promote specific videos and users by granting them heightened visibility (see Fig. 1.2.1).

The heightened visibilities entailed by high performance and by promotion were at once indices of and rewards for these phenomena. That is, on the one hand, a position on the ‘Most Subscribed’ or ‘All Time’ ranking signaled that a user had succeeded to attract subscriptions from many other users, and a video on the front page that a user’s video had found the appreciation of YouTube staff. On the other hand, the increased visibility through the representation was also the reward for performance and promotion. Increased visibility was all that video contributors could get from YouTube Inc. in the time before ad revenue sharing was introduced in 2007. Such representations of high performance and promotion signaled success on YouTube in the ways in which they were framed by the interface and in user practice, which will become clear throughout the remainder of chapter 7.

In this chapter I am going to focus on the performance side of the system, which was constituted by functions for the evaluation of videos and users and a comparative and competitive matrix relying on quantified viewer activity in terms various parameters.

Video performance

On video pages, viewers were meant to evaluate videos by rating them, saving them as favorites, or flagging them. The rating function was modified several times. In July 2006 videos could be rated with zero to five stars; and average ratings were shown on video pages (Fig. 1.2.2). Comments and video responses were not explicitly designed for evaluation but frequently used in such a manner (Müller, “Formatted Spaces of Participation” 58).

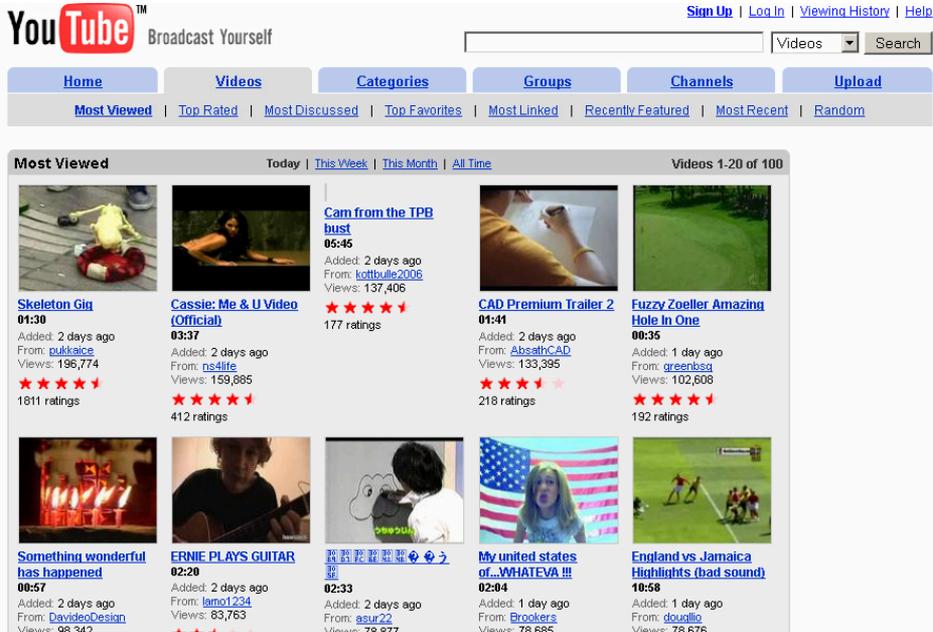
A “Watch Videos” tab was added to the interface in August 2005 and provided access to pages listing individual videos, which were granted visibility in terms of different parameters. The majority of parameters were performance-based throughout. Videos were ranked on these pages according to their performance, relying on data collected on individual video pages. In June 2006 the performance-based parameters were “Most Viewed,” “Top Rated,” “Most Discussed,” “Top Favorites,” and “Most Linked”. Further parameters were “Recently Featured,” “Most Recent,” and “Random” (Fig. 7.2.1). For a few weeks in July and August “Worst Rated” was a parameter that ranked videos in terms of performance of a ‘different’ kind.⁸⁵ For each parameter, there were different time ranges of the performance: “Today,” “This Week,” “This Month,” and “All Time.”

It is important to note that YouTube did not only rank videos in terms of performance parameters that look familiar from film or television, but also in terms of parameters that have been understood as communicative or indicative of social network ties elsewhere (e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54). On the “Most Discussed” ranking, for example, – introduced as early as August 2005 – videos were ranked according to the numbers of comments they had attracted. While “All Comments” were not shown on a video page (Fig. 1.2.3), they were certainly all counted and could thus contribute to a video’s appearance on the “Most Discussed” ranking. The extent of ‘sharing’ was also measured and ranked on the “Most Linked” ranking which was introduced in June 2006. In early 2007 numbers of video responses became a parameter of video performance, too, with the introduction of the “Most Respon-

⁸⁵ This ranking was introduced by July 1 and discontinued by August 10, 2006. See tabs on “Most Viewed” of “Today” ranking archived on these dates.

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ded” ranking.⁸⁶ In chapter 7.3 it will be shown that this was not a crude quantification of ‘authentic’ response but the result of users’ informal contests to receive many video responses.



7.2.1 Cropped screenshot of the “Most Viewed” videos of “Today” ranking on June 5, 2006.

User performance

Interestingly, YouTube never enabled users to rate or favorite each other. A subscription was an evaluation of a user of some sort. Comments on profile pages were also commonly used to evaluate other users. The user of the account UTUBEPEDIA, for example, posted “Keep up the good word...” to RENETTO (Internet Archive, 8 Dec. 2007).

⁸⁶ See tabs listed on “Most Recent” ranking archived on August 10, 2005, on “Most Viewed” of “Today” ranking archived on June 5, 2006 and on February 2, 2007 respectively.

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Following the introduction of the option of subscribing to another user's videos in October 2005, numbers of subscribers and of the times a profile had been viewed were displayed on profile pages (Fig. 1.2.4). Users were ranked in terms of the subscribers they had attracted from April 2006 on the "Most Subscribed" list. Time ranges for user's performance in attracting subscribers were "This Month," "3 Months," and "All Time" (Fig. 1.2.8). Pages that ranked users in terms of the views all their videos had attracted were added in late June with the options "Today," "This Week," "This Month," and "All Time."⁸⁷

Did users care?

YouTube presented a contributing user with the indices of her/his performance in various parameters in various places on the platform. Other YouTube users and visitors were also made aware of her/his performance. Rankings directly compared videos and users in terms of their performance. Users and their videos became part of a competitive system – if they wanted to or not –, but did they care about achievement and about the YouTube success that the representation of achievement signaled?

Showing their videos was a dedicated motivation of the users from the corpus for using YouTube. All of them chose to publicly release their videos to a viewership that potentially included all Internet users. Thus it is safe to assume that all of them wanted their videos to be watched by others and also appreciated (positive) reactions. The system in which they were placed added a second level to this 'basic' caring: caring for success in the system itself in terms of the parameters it defined. As we will see in the next chapter, users' 'basic' caring for having their videos watched and responded to and of caring for YouTube success commonly overlapped or became indistinguishable.

Nevertheless, there were certainly differences in terms of the extent to which users cared. Those users who were already publicly showing audiovisual artifacts elsewhere or were pursuing a related career, such as the users of SMOSH, BLUNTY3000, RENETTO, LONELYGIRL15, LISANOVA, LITTLELOCA, and TERRANAOMI (see 2.1 Who are you?), were probably aiming at large numbers of viewers already when joining YouTube.

⁸⁷ See tabs on "Most Subscribed" of "This Month" ranking archived on July 1, 2006.

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Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000), for example, said that his initial aim to join YouTube was to “expand the audience” for his stop-motion animation videos (Interview by Tim Burrowes).

For others, such as the users of BROOKERS, MORBECK, and THEWINE-KONE the extent of exposure and response for their videos were apparently not significant when joining YouTube, but the dynamics of performance and competition prefigured by the interface and the glories of YouTube success made them care. Pedro Morbeck’s video *My YouTube Story / Morbeck*, uploaded in 2010, can be used to illustrate how such caring came about. Morbeck visited YouTube for the first time after watching an “embedded” video on another website. On YouTube he encountered the videos of EMOKID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21, which he thought were “real” and “pretty weird,” so he decided to make a “parody”:

I was like, I’m going to make a video about this. I think it’s going to be easy, to just record something real quick, and I don’t know... just put it up, right? Let’s see how that works. So I did that: I did an emogirl parody. And that gave me like 10,000 hits in one day – that ... and that is back in 2006 when YouTube was starting. So I was like, damn, like, oh my God, like, 100 comments on a video, that’s crazy. And then I made a video about this other girl [...], and that was pretty popular, too. [...] So I started making parodies of nornna and other YouTubers [...]. And I started getting a lot of attention. People making videos about me saying they rather watch me than watch nornna, or that that I was so much better than everything else, that I was so funny, and this and that. I started getting a very big boost of confidence. And I started buying more equipment, [...] getting really into it.

Morbeck’s video ‘memoir’ accounts for how success in the performance metrics and through individual positive evaluations encouraged the production of more videos and of increasing the overall efforts and production values. However, it also accounts for the opposite development. During a period of serious health problems, the quality of his videos decreased according to his own and other people’s assessment: “I started making some videos that didn’t make sense at all” for which “most people” gave him “shit.” Occasionally, he still “made some videos that got popular, but most of the time they were just like 1000

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hits or something.” At some point he “was about to give up on YouTube.”

In general, the overall extent to which performance in evaluations and rankings and YouTube success increasingly mattered, is indicated by the production of videos that celebrated reaching specific numbers of subscribers (see p. 336), by manipulations of the metrics in late 2006, and the anger such manipulations incited in users who did not want to lose visibility because of so-called “cheaters” (p. 338).

There is, however, also an individual case of a vlogger in the corpus who virtually stopped uploading videos and made most of her older videos private when attention for her videos increased. Amiee Jacobsen uploaded only a single video to her THAUMATA profile after the introduction of the ‘Most Subscribed’ or ‘All Time’ ranking, which initially listed her (see Fig. 1.2.8). In an Email she reflected on her reasons for leaving YouTube: “In the end, I stopped vlogging because it stopped being niche. YouTube exploded overnight and suddenly I could not keep up with the comments, many of which were characteristically mean.” She went back to her private text blog on LiveJournal where she had “much better control over who can read what” (“Re: Research on video blogs,” 9 March 2010). Apart from showing videos of musical performances (which she is uploading to SoundCloud today), personal exchange and networking with select others had been Jacobsen’s motivations for using YouTube (see also Fig. 1.2.4). According to her own assessment, such a use of YouTube was not unproblematically possible for her anymore at some point. However, Jacobsen is an exception in this regard in the corpus of video contributors who turned out successful.

7.3 Aiming for Success

It is impossible to distinguish between aiming to have one’s videos watched by others and receiving reactions in a pristine way not ‘tainted’ by the competitive dynamics of the interface on the one side, and aiming for success in the system on the other. For simplicity’s sake, I use ‘aiming for success on YouTube’ throughout this chapter while it is implied that many users were looking for high numbers of viewers for their videos already when joining YouTube.

The system measured video and user performance and translated high performance into success through representation on video and

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profile pages and in rankings. It also specified time ranges for the performance. Accordingly, users could aim at success of different kinds and longevity. Via the 'Most Viewed' rankings the system enabled users to be successful with videos that were primarily watched – and via the 'Most Discussed' rankings with videos that were commented on. YouTube enabled users to have their proverbial '15 minutes of fame' with a one-shot viral video that would appear in the 'Most Viewed' or 'Most Discussed' videos of 'Today' rankings. It also enabled users to build and sustain increasing and increasingly dedicated viewer bases through the ongoing production of videos to which more and more viewers subscribed, thus heading for a place on the 'Most Subscribed' or 'All Time' ranking. Accordingly, it is no surprise that users' tactics aimed for different kinds of success in terms of quality and longevity.

Here is a brief overview of the prime ways in which the users from the corpus – video bloggers and the users running unacknowledged fictional vlogs – aimed for success:

- creating innovative and well-made videos,
- appealing to sexuality,
- referring to more successful users,
- creating videos that 'begged' for comments,
- soliciting response,
- teaming up with similarly successful users,
- asking viewers to push one's performance,
- spreading the videos,
- sustaining viewers, and
- manipulating the metrics.

In the following, these ways of striving for success are outlined or discussed. In a couple of instances this involves a reconceptualization of activities that are typically regarded as communication and social networking, which I suggest is more descriptive of how these activities played out. A focus in this regard is on references between users, which makes that section by far the longest.

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Creating innovative and well-made videos

In the context of arguments that on YouTube “content creation is probably far less significant than the uses of that content within various social network settings” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 58) and that “[c]ontent is NOT king” but a sophisticated strategy to support viral distribution (Greenberg), it is interesting to see that some vloggers advise to create innovative and well-made videos in order to become successful on YouTube, for example Tony Huynh and Nate Burr:

Do something innovative, something unique, that someone has never done on a webcam and then show it to the world.

(THEWINEKONE, *3:00 AM Madness*)

The best way, in my view, is to make a genuinely entertaining video that is well-thought out, probably planned in advance. People will watch, people will enjoy, people will subscribe. [...] A really simple formula.

(BLUNTY3000, *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*)

I hope to have shown throughout this study that the videos created by these users and by several others, like those of SMOSH, MORBECK, RENETTO, and LONELYGIRL15, were innovative and well-made – according to the standards evolving on YouTube itself, of course. Even though there are few statements in this regard,⁸⁸ these were also probably ways in which these users themselves tried to receive high numbers of views, get viewers to subscribe, and be recognized as successful on YouTube. As in the cases of other ways of aiming for success, I suggest that considerations about success did not start after the upload of the video but were already part of its production.

Appealing to sexuality

Apart from the above-mentioned “best way,” two ways to become “popular” offered by Nate Burr concern sexy displays: “strip [...] if you are a hot chick or a gay man,” and “dance in your underwear” (*Vblog -*

⁸⁸ See e.g. BLUNTY3000, *YouTube SCAMMING*; and MORBECK, *To the fans and haters*.

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how to be popular on youtube). This is in line with Dan Greenberg, in whose 2007 YouTube viral marketing manual “[a]ppeal to sex” was a piece of advice.⁸⁹

The vlogger of GAYGOD was known for dancing in his underwear, sometimes accompanied by female friends (e.g. *GayGod dances to Christina Aguilera with friends*). The vloggers of FILTHYWHORE and SEXXIEBEBE23 specialized in sexy displays, as a compilation video from a fan suggests (RASHB, *FilthyWhore vs Sexxiebebe23 Movie Trailer*). They appeared on positions 2 and 3 of the “Most Subscribed” of “All Time” ranking on May 17 and would have become part of the corpus if the former had not closed her account and the latter’s account had not been closed by YouTube.⁹⁰

Apart from the video itself, suggestive titling and choice of thumbnail images were ways of using sex to aim for success, largely by generating high numbers of views for individual videos. A thumbnail image was a small still image that represented a video in various possible places, for example in the list of videos on a user’s channel page (Fig. 1.2.5), in the list of “Featured Videos” on the home page, in the rankings of the “Videos” tab (Fig. 7.2.1), in search results, and in the column of “Related Videos” shown on video pages and elsewhere (Fig. 1.2.2). The thumbnail was hyperlinked and led a visitor to the video’s page. YouTube changed its policy with regards to how thumbnail images were generated several times. It seems that the thumbnail image could be chosen by the uploading user during the time of interest but had to be chosen from the uploaded audiovisual material itself. To represent *The California Stereotype Experiment*, SMOSH chose a frame showing the only woman they interviewed in the video. They also used this thumbnail to represent their channel, thus the image of the woman

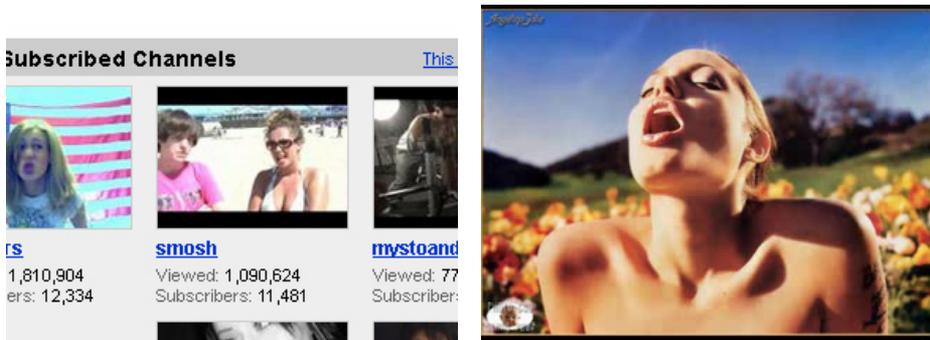
⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Burr also says that some videos “end up getting deleted” because people “strip down too far.” YouTube’s “Community Guidelines” vaguely stated: “YouTube is not for pornography or sexually explicit content” (archived 24 Oct. 2006). In practice, this meant that videos showing genitals, buttocks, and female nipples were censored – like in American mainstream popular culture in general.

⁹⁰ SEXXIEBEBE23 was “terminated” by YouTube “due to repeated or severe violations of our Community Guidelines and/or claims of copyright infringement” (profile accessed 22 Nov. 2012). It is thus not clear whether the channel was terminated because the vlogger “stripped down too far” or for another reason.

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in her bikini shows up on the 'Most Subscribed' ranking among other places (Fig. 7.3.1).

Some users added risqué material unrelated to their videos' topics, only to choose a thumbnail image from, as a post in the *YouTube Blog* bemoans (6 Aug. 2006). There is a single example of this device in the corpus – and a tongue-in-cheek use of the device at that. In Morbeck's *My Real Sex* the material showing the vlogger is abruptly interrupted by a non-diegetic still image of an orgasming woman who is shown for a few seconds. In voiceover Morbeck comments: "And now our thumbnail break. We'll be back with your show in just a minute" (Fig. 7.3.2).



7.3.1-2 Thumbnail image of the video *The California Stereotype Experiment* on the 'Most Subscribed' of 'All Time' ranking (Internet Archive, 19 July 2006). Frame from non-diegetic still in Morbeck's *My Real Sex* which provided the video's thumbnail image.

Referring to more successful users

A common way of trying to become successful was to create a video that referred to a user who was more successful or to an individual viral video. This comprised addressing another user, speaking about another user or her/his videos, impersonating another user, using audiovisual material from another user's videos, and further techniques. Such a video was meant to attract viewers by 'tapping' the success of another user or video. Such a video could create initial attention for one's own channel. To make the tactic work, the reference

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had to be ‘readable’ for the algorithms of the platform and for YouTube users and visitors.

Making references readable

A common device was to quote the user name and/or video title of the user/video that one’s video referred to in the video title. Chances were that one’s video would show up as a result of searches for the user name and video title of the other user or be displayed among the column of ‘Related’ videos while the other video was playing. Before becoming successful himself, Paul Robinett created reviews of videos by successful users or of individual viral videos, quoting user names or video titles, for example, in the titles *FilthyWhore*, *Say It’s Possible*, and *UFO Over New York City*.



7.3.3 Cropped screenshot from the video page of LONELYGIRL15's *YouTubers Secret Language* (Internet Archive, 19 July 2006).

Tagging a video with the user name of the other user was another device to make the reference readable. In *Paytotheorderofofof vs. Dinosaur* and *YouTubers Secret Language*, the first videos uploaded to LONELYGIRL15, audiovisual material from several successful vlogs was quoted and recontextualized. The trio running the project tried to “piggyback on the existing audience” of the respective vloggers (Davis). In *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* Bree addressed several successful vloggers diegetically. For every quoted or addressed vlog-

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ger, her/his user name was added as a tag when the videos were uploaded (Figs. 7.3.3).

The Video Response function of the interface was inspired by users' quoting of video titles and specifically designed to support references to videos from others in May 2006, according to one of YouTube's co-founders (Karim). When uploading a video, a user could contextualize her/his video as a "Video Response" to another video, and thus make the reference readable even without quoting the other video's title. A thumbnail linking to the referring video would show up in a box further down on the referred-to video's page (Fig. 7.3.4). The hyperlinked line "This is a video response to [video name]" would appear underneath the referring video (Fig. 7.3.5). The posting user qualified her/his video as 'secondary' to an 'initial' video. The compensation was an increase of attention for the video from appearing on the successful video's page.

Views: **193,595** | / Comments: **1569** | Favorited: **2407** times | [less stats...](#)

Sites Linking to This Video:

84 clicks from <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user...>
45 clicks from <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user...>
25 clicks from <http://beboframe.com/FlashFrame.jsp?Size=S&Video...>
19 clicks from <http://www.gaiaonline.com/profile/index.php?view=pro...>
11 clicks from <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user...>

Loading Honors... [close](#)

Comments & Responses

Video Responses ([4 responses](#)) [Post a Video Response](#)



[surfhatswe](#) [renetto](#) [STAROSS](#) [rellimseven](#)

Text Comments (1569)

[Post a text comment](#)

7.3.4 Cropped screenshot from the video page of the viral video *Say It's Possible* (MYNAMEISMEGHAN, Internet Archive, 21 Dec. 2006).

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This is a video response to [Say It's Possible](#)

Rate this video: 208 ratings

[Save to Favorites](#) [Share Video](#) [Flag as Inappropriate](#)

[Add to Groups](#) [Post Video](#)

Views: **16,024** | Comments: **128** | Favorited: **58** times | [more stats...](#)

Comments & Responses

[Post a video response](#)
[Post a text comment](#)

Most Recent ... [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) ... [Oldest](#)

[gavinnw](#) (2 days ago)

I subscribed to your videos yesterday so you are a familiar stream from britain uk

7.3.5 Cropped screenshot from a “video response” also entitled *Say It's Possible* (RENETTO, 20 Jan. 2007).

References as communicative acts?

The ways of referring to other users or their videos that were mentioned at the beginning of this section are typically regarded as communication between members of the so-called YouTube community.⁹¹ There certainly are examples of videos in which a communicative act – even a personal communicative act – is conspicuous (e.g. GERI-ATRIC1927, *Re: Who are you....Who, Who...Who, Who*). However, this is far from universal and does not call for the generalizing arguments that have been made. In many videos in which users are “referring to” and “building on [...] each other’s videos,” in parodies and “remixed vlog entries” in particular (Burgess and Green, YouTube 59, 65), there simply is no indication that the videos were intended as or functioning

⁹¹ Lange, “Reciprocities and Tensions;” Burgess 101; Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 59, 65; “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105.

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as the purported “vehicle[s] of communication” between the respective users (59). Neither is a character of such videos as “community-oriented activities” conspicuous (65).

Paul Robinett addresses the user of the other channel in only one of the three mentioned video reviews, and even in that video (FILTHY-WHORE) address of implied YouTube viewers (which are not referred to as a community) predominates.

In *Emokid21Ohio proves he’s American* Morbeck impersonates the fictional vlogger character of that channel without addressing him – or his creator – in the video or in the video description. Performing as EmoKid, he addresses implied viewers in the video, viewers that are nowhere specified as ‘the’ or ‘a’ YouTube ‘community.’ Speaking as himself in the video description and about EmoKid in the third person, Morbeck addresses a particular segment of viewers: “To all of you who didn’t believe him there goes the proof.”

The quotes from other users’ videos in THEWINEKONE’s *Internet Recognition* and *Hand Gestures* (see pp. 261 and 287) should not be misinterpreted as communication between Tony Huynh and the quoted users. The quotes in the former video were intended and are functioning as examples of Huynh’s success with “girls” on YouTube. Nowhere in the videos does he address the quoted users. He speaks about them in the third person as mere examples of “girls;” only one of them is referred to individually as “that Jen girl who said I was good-looking.” Quoting PAYTOTHEORDEROFOFOF2’s appropriation of his “weird hand gesture” in the latter video does not involve addressing the user either, and is largely meant to illustrate the reach of his own videos. While an implied viewership is addressed in both videos, it is specified as a community in neither of them.

Instead of communication, intertextuality would be an overall concept to cover all videos that refer to other videos (Murfin and Ray 219-220). Other users and videos became video objects for new videos in Robinett’s reviews and Morbeck’s spoofs. For Tony Huynh the shout-outs from other users and the appropriation of his hand gesture were material for the creation of new videos. I already suggested that intertextuality in video blogging in general can be seen as a response to scarcity of material for video projects (p. 90).

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Video bloggers' statements about references as a means of aiming for success

Video bloggers conceptualized the creation of such references as a way of becoming successful in several instances. After “hanging out on YouTube” for a night, Nate Burr observed and advised in his first tutorial video: “Bitch about other users, a guaranteed way to get views, particularly if the users you’re bitching about are already popular. FilthyWhore’s a popular choice” (*Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*). In his second tutorial he proposed “[d]o a video reply to another popular video that you like or appreciate” as a way to “gain popularity”: Make “a video that talks about the other video, makes fun of it, does a spoof” (*More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!*).

Particularly interesting are statements in which vloggers observe that others are using the devices of making videos that refer to other videos readable without actually establishing a reference in their videos themselves only in order to generate views. Nate Burr observed and spoke out against such ‘abusive’ tactics:

A lot of people will throw in a whole list of popular users or famous users [into the tag field] just to get hits. When the whole EmoKid whole phase was going, there were so many videos that had EMOKID21OHIO just in the thing and the video had nothing to do with it: It pissed me off. (*Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*)

After two of his videos were shown on YouTube’s home page in early August 2006 and became successful,⁹² Paul Robinett complained that removing “spam” – unrelated videos posted as video responses to his videos – took up a lot of time. He observed that many users posted their videos as video responses to successful videos “just [to] get views” (*This Is YouTube at its best!*).

⁹² These videos were not online anymore when archiving the core corpus, but the vlogger speaks about his first and very recently featured video in *Who are you* on August 2. An archived version of the YouTube home page shows a second video being featured on August 9.

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The relevance of success levels for users' references to other users and their videos

Referring to other users or their videos can be seen as a way of coping with the scarcity of video objects. In line with vloggers' statements above, a large number of videos that dedicatedly refer to other users or videos can also be regarded as maneuvers of becoming more successful. An overall observation that supports this reading is that the vast majority of such videos referred to users or videos that were more successful than the posting users at the time of posting. More specifically, such videos were posted by several users who turned out to be successful when they were not successful yet – and were not posted anymore or became less common when they had become popular themselves.

The makers of LONELYGIRL15 referred to individual users who were not part of their fictional storyworld only in their first couple of videos, when they did not have a viewer base on their own. Success came quick: When the Internet Archive stored the video pages of *YouTubers Secret Language* and *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* for the first time on July 19, these videos had already attracted 20,154 and 70,545 views respectively. *Dorkiness Prevails* had attracted two video responses itself on July 19. The creators of LONELYGIRL15 had stopped referring to individual other users in their videos by this time (e.g. *Boy Problems...* and *He Said, She Said*).

Morbeck was surprised about how successful his parody of the infamous EMOKID21OHIO turned out, which prompted him to create parodies of further users and user characters (*My YouTube Story / Morbeck*). All of them – EMOGIRL21, NORRNA, BOWIECHICK, FILTHY-WHORE, and LITTLELOCA among others – were more successful than himself at the time of posting; most of them appeared on the 'Most Subscribed' rankings archived on May 17 and June 12 which did not rank MORBECK yet. Morbeck's own channel appeared on rankings archived on June 23 and July 21. During this time he uploaded eight videos neither of which dedicatedly referred to individual others. For comparison, of the first eight videos uploaded to his channel, six referred to other users (or user characters) to an extent that they can be considered as the videos' objects (channel page, accessed 27 April 2010).

Paul Robinett's YouTube contribution also started with videos that referred to successful videos or videos from successful users. Such videos became rare after two of his own videos were featured by You-

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Tube in early August. He had entered the 'Most Subscribed' ranking by August 21.

There are a couple of videos in the corpus in which users refer to users on a similar level of success, for example on Morbeck's *Bo-h3m3, now this IS a spoof*. These references (or brief exchanges) are usually hostile, and Burgess and Green's characterization of such events as "face-offs between YouTube stars" seems fitting (*YouTube* 97). Tony Huynh quotes several users from a lower level of popularity in *Internet Recognition*, but they are not dedicatedly dealt with.

Significantly, there are virtually no videos in the corpus that refer to users (or user characters) or videos that were on a lower success level than the posting user at the time of posting and that dedicatedly deal with these users. Such users are only casually treated, for example as brief items on a list of several user names (see p. 335).

Reading references as success-motivated also allows us to make sense of the absence of references on a few very successful channels. Videos that point to other users or videos are virtually missing on BROOKERS and SMOSH. Brodack and Hecox/Padilla were pioneer video bloggers and the most-consistently successful users throughout the time of interest, appearing on positions 9, 1, 4 and 1, 2, 2 of the rankings archived on May 17, July 19, and December 31, 2006. For them, there simply were not many more successful users out there to whose videos they could have referred in order to become even more successful. Of course this does not make them anti-social: Offline video production and profilmic performance were collaborative and communicative on both channels, involving interaction between two friends and two siblings. They simply did not 'have to' use devices (that were not essentially communicative) to become successful.

How did users that were already successful react?

On the one hand, the number of video responses attracted by a video was an index of its successful performance. As we will see in the section "Soliciting response," several users actively solicited video responses aiming for high numbers. On the other hand, video responses invariably drew viewers away from a video to the video of the responding user. Not all users were willing to let others grab a share of their viewers and success in this way. Hecox and Padilla, for example, were very restrictive in approving of video responses posted to their

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videos. On archived video pages of SMOSH videos, there are few “Video Responses” shown, while a search for their video’s titles yields many videos quoting these titles and establishing valid references in the audiovisual material itself (e.g. *Smosh Short 1: Dolls*, see p. 351). It is likely that users posted such videos in the Video Response box but that Hecox and Padilla simply did not approve them to show up on their own video pages.

On the video page of a video posted as a video response to another video, the hyperlinked title of the referred-to video would appear right underneath the video player. This characterized the video as secondary to the video of another user. It also invariably drew attention from the video away to the other user’s video (see Fig. 7.3.5). For users that were already successful, the Video Response function was thus an interface function without any usefulness. However, a few of them found a way to use it – or abuse it rather – in a manner that suited them, namely to refer to their own videos.

In *UFO Over New York City* Paul Robinett reviewed a video of the same title uploaded by a user named JOHNNYSAUCER on July, 15 2006. The latter video had been featured by YouTube and attracted over 600,000 views in merely four days.⁹³ At the time of posting his video on July 31, Robinett’s videos had not been featured and he was not ranked among the most subscribed users yet. The immense success of johnnysaucer’s video made it eligible for a video review. Because the page was not regularly archived, it is not clear whether Robinett ever posted it as a video response to the popular video. By the end of 2006, however, when Robinett was listed on the ‘Most Subscribed’ ranking (Internet Archive, 11 and 22 Dec.), he had recontextualized *UFO over New York City* as a “video response” to his own *EXCLUSIVE YouTube Founder Chad Hurley Interview!* video (Fig. 7.3.6). In the context of his complaint about unrelated videos posted as video responses, it is interesting to see that his videos were not related in terms of content: Robinett merely used the Video Response function to channel attention from one of his videos to another.

⁹³ See YouTube’s home page at the Internet Archive on July 19.

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UFO Over New York City



7.3.6 Cropped screenshot of RENETTO's *UFO Over New York City* archived on December 20, 2006.

The makers of LONELYGIRL15 did not initially contextualize their first videos as video responses, probably because every one of these videos referred to more than one other video. They did contextualize them as such at a later point – albeit as responses to other videos released on their channel. The video page of *YouTubers Secret Language* archived on February 15, 2007 still shows the user names of the users quoted in the video as tags. The video itself, however, is qualified as a video response to LONELYGIRL15's own *Paytotheorderofof vs. Dinosaur*. The video page also shows that *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails*, the next video released on the channel, had been qualified as a video response to *YouTubers Secret Language* by that time (Fig. 7.3.7).

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This is a video response to [Paytotheorderofof vs. Dinosaur](#)

Rate this video: 647 ratings

[Save to Favorites](#) [Share Video](#) [Flag as Inappropriate](#)
[Add to Groups](#) [Post Video](#)

Views: **152,346** | Comments: **278** | Favorited: **152** times

Honors: **0** | Links: **5** | Responses: **1**

Comments & Responses

Video Responses ([view all 1 responses](#)) [Post a Video Response](#)

[lonelvalrd1](#)

Text Comments (278) [Post a text comment](#)

Provided By: DIRECTOR

I love all you guys, but sometimes I have NOOOO idea what you are saying. So, I thought I'd try to translate it myself :) ([less](#))

Category: Comedy

Tags: [paytotheorderofof](#) [thewinekone](#) [gestures](#) [fifthwhore](#) [kaiserr01](#) [brookers](#) [scream0](#) [sexxiebebe23](#) [morbeck](#) [love](#) [bowiechick](#) ([less](#))

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51h0dDsxwMc>

Embed: `<object width="425" height="350"><param name`

Related **More from this user** **Playlists**

Showing 1-20 of 81 [See All Videos](#)

[Rescuing Daniel](#)
02:20
From: [lonelvalrd15](#)
Views: 246504

7.3.7 Cropped screenshot from the video page of *YouTubers Secret Language* archived on February 15, 2007.

Creating videos that ‘begged’ for comments

Producing videos that were likely to receive many comments was a way of aiming for a place on the ‘Most Discussed’ ranking. In his second tutorial, Nate Burr names two qualities that a user could rely on which made a video likely to receive many comments:

Make a video that is so bad or so controversial that people can't resist commenting. There are a couple of YouTubers that are on the most commented list that are doing this. And if you watch those most commented videos, you know who I'm talking about.

This largely goes in the direction of asking for negative comments, of aiming for notoriety. Further qualities that made a video likely to receive many such comments were a confrontational, exuberant, crazy, annoying, or boring performance. All behavior that was likely to attract bullies – such as showing a weakness, or any kind of minority status or interest – also made negative comments likely.

It is not too difficult to find examples of videos that received many comments and for which comments focusing on these qualities prevailed, and which may be the result of a tactic of aiming for success through high numbers of comments. In his EMOKID21OHIO videos, Ben

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Johnson went for video quality that was below the evolving YouTube standard, assumed the status of a member of a minority youth culture, and alternatively attacked, bored, and annoyed his implied viewers (e.g. *My First Video Blog*; see also Netburn). Some of Brodack's videos begged for comments through the exuberance and fervor of her performance (e.g. *Im special*).

Soliciting response

There were different motivations for explicitly asking viewers for comments and video responses (see discussion of *Who are you* in chapter 7.1). Communication within a social network or the YouTube community has received a lot of emphasis in the research thus far (e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54, 56). In a system in which response was quantified and represented as an index of a dedicated viewership, it is no surprise that several users actively sought to receive many comments and video responses. Particularly interesting in this regard are videos in which receiving comments and video responses was a constitutive part of the video project.

On August 10, about six weeks after entering the 'Most Subscribed' of 'All Time' ranking (see Internet Archive, 23 June), Morbeck announced *The Hottest of YouTube 2006 Contest*. Performing as Chipmunk Chick, he asked viewers to "dress to kill" in a short video and "post it as a video response" to his video. He also asked them to cast votes about the hottest submission in the comment section. He promised to count votes and to create "one big video with the top ten winners." The video itself started a contest, building on the overall competitive environment of YouTube, and it can be seen as an element of competition among contributing users to receive many video responses at the time. Towards the end of the video, Morbeck says that several other users were soliciting responses. RENETTO's *Who are you*, uploaded on August 2, was not primarily success-motivated (see p. 303), but its success 'inspired' other users to also solicit response in videos during the following weeks and months – and possibly surpass others in the number of video responses received.

Morbeck uploaded the mashup video *Hottest of YouTube 2006 Contest Winners* on August 20. Around this time the previous video announcing the contest had received impressive 1344 comments and 106 video responses (Internet Archive, 21 Aug. 2006). A hierarchy between a host and submitters was inscribed into Morbeck's contest

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project. Thus it is perhaps no surprise that there were no users among the submitters who were on a similar level of success as Morbeck at the time of posting.

Morbeck uploaded a video called *Biggest Video Response Chain Ever* in the same month. Performing as himself, he announced that he would approve of all posted video responses no matter if they were related to his video: “Let’s see how many video responses we get.” In spite of the video’s title, the project was not about creating a chain of responses but about getting many responses to “just one video.” Morbeck explicitly referred to an unofficial “YouTube’s biggest video response chain contest ever” that was going on the platform at the time and declared his video (via the number of video responses it would attract) to be a contestant. The stated aim was to “make YouTube history.”

Morbeck solicited entries for two more contests in 2006. From contest to contest, Morbeck’s own popularity became a stronger focus of the projects and the calls for responses. In the video announcing the third contest viewers were asked to perform as Chipmunk Chick or as another MORBECK character (*Impersonation Contest*). In the fourth contest one of several still photographs of the vlogger – performing as himself, provided by himself – were meant to be edited in image editing software (*Morbeck Photoshop Contest*). The visibility and agency of submitters and ‘voters’ decreased from contest to contest. From the third contest on, Morbeck did not allow voting anymore, but chose the winners himself. In the video announcing the fourth contest he promised: “The winning entries will be featured in a video along with your name.” Nevertheless, the winners were mentioned neither in the eventual video *Photoshop Contest Entries* nor in its video description.

In the context of the increasing bluntness of the calls for response, the stronger focus on Morbeck’s own popularity in the contests, and the decreasing submitter and ‘voter’ visibility and agency, it is perhaps no surprise that the actual numbers of responses he received decreased from project to project (video pages, accessed 27 April 2010). Viewers of his videos were meant to celebrate a self-declared “YouTube celebrity” (Morbeck in *Biggest Video Response Chain Ever*), to create response (which was measured and translated into success), and to provide material for new videos – which fewer and fewer wanted to do. The turnout was still high enough to create a mashup video of the winning submissions in each of these contests though.

In view of contributing users’ informal contests to receive many video responses in the second half of 2006, the introduction of the

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'Most Responded' ranking at the end of January 2007 seems like a coherent reaction from the company.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, there are about a dozen cases of videos in the corpus in which response is solicited, which means that the phenomenon is far from ubiquitous. It seems to be a trend that materialized in a close interrelation with the evolution of the YouTube interface. Such projects were started only after the introduction of the Video Response function and became less common some time after the introduction of the 'Most Responded' ranking. It seems that the novelty of such a tactic/such projects was quickly exhausted. YouTube scrapped the ranking at some point, and in 2013 even scrapped the Video Response function itself because it was not frequently used anymore, according to a YouTube staff member (qtd. Tufnell).

Teaming up with similarly successful users

Collaborative video production and distribution/exhibition by different users of the platform (i.e. by a user running one account and a user running another) was not prefigured by the interface and could thus only come about as the result of users' own initiatives, as Burgess and Green correctly observe. Such collaboration between video bloggers on YouTube in spite of the interface is an important element in their argument about a community of YouTube users (65). Nevertheless, the only example of a collaborative video the authors provide came about on a different platform and was posted there (64-65).

Online collaborations were extremely rare in the corpus of successful contributing users of 2005 and 2006, of which the vast majority were video bloggers. Moreover, only users on a similar level of success teamed up with each other. A successful user could not expect to benefit from a collaboration with a less-successful user: The latter would most likely be drawing on the former's viewer base only. Users situated on the same success level could expect to equivalently draw on each other's viewers through a collaboration: a win-win situation.

In mid-June 2006 Pedro Morbeck (located in Brasília) collaborated with David Skyler (located in Los Angeles) to produce the video *Erotic Photo Shoot*. In the video the story of Chipmunk Chick visiting a shady

⁹⁴ Ranking first shows up on a "Most Viewed" videos of "Today" page archived on February 2.

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casting agent in Hollywood is narrated using shot/reverse-shot editing. Looking at the video, we get an idea of its likely production history (Figs. 7.3.8-9). Morbeck and/or Skyler wrote a script. Morbeck produced the footage for the Chipmunk Chick shots and David Skyler for the shots showing the agent (performed by himself). One of them sent his footage to the other; the latter edited the video, and sent the finished video to the former. Each of them uploaded the video to his channel and posted the video as a video response to the video of the other.⁹⁵ Morbeck was entering the 'Most Subscribed' charts around this time (see p. 321). David Skyler (DAVIDSKYLER) was not listed on the ranking. However, he was a dedicated video producer who participated in commercial video contests, for example at Kiss Kiss Bang Bang Casting.⁹⁶ He had also appeared as an actor in several alternative music videos.⁹⁷ His ambitions and standing at the margins of the American entertainment industry qualified him as a collaborator for Morbeck.



7.3.8-9 Two subsequent shots from *Erotic Photo Shoot*. Chipmunk Chick: “You’re so not gonna publish this because my reputation will be ruined, okay?”

⁹⁵ Skyler’s video shows up as a video response on the video page on MORBECK archived on June 24, 2006.

⁹⁶ Morbeck refers to one of Skyler’s videos participating in the contest in one of his own videos (*My nipples are hard*).

⁹⁷ See video description of his own upload of the music video for Cannibal Corpse’s “Make Them Suffer.”

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There is only one other example of a collaboration between users of different channels in the corpus.⁹⁸ At some point in fall 2006, Paul Robinett (RENETTO) and Ben Going (BOH3M3) – both among the ‘Most Subscribed’ users at the time (see Internet Archive, e.g. on Sept. 3) – met up to shoot a video together. According to their *Wikipedia* entries, the former was living in Canal-Winchester, Ohio and the latter in Huntsville, Alabama, which meant that a distance of about 500 miles had to be bridged. The online interactions between two successful vloggers lead to a real-world meeting and collaborative production in the case of this video. The video is no longer online, but Tony Huynh quoted material and used it in one of his own videos (Fig. 7.3.10).



7.3.10 The vloggers of BOH3M3 and RENETTO in footage from a collaborative video (qtd. in *Internet Creepo* on THEWINEKONE).

The fact that the interface did not support online collaborative production and distribution/exhibition and the conspicuous efforts that had to be taken in the production of both examples make it plausible why the users from the corpus only very rarely collaborated as a way of becoming more successful (or for other reasons). Moreover, in a ranking system such as YouTube’s, there virtually could not be users on the

⁹⁸ I previously mentioned the plan of the American vlogger of KATZ20TWO to start living with Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) in Australia and to open a joint YouTube channel for collaborative videos (p. 172). It is not clear if their plans ever materialized. Searching for a collaborative channel and searching for links to such a channel on their regular channel pages did not provide any results. Neither could I find collaborative videos on their regular channels.

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same level. Collaborating thus involved assuming a similar level of success against the data.

Asking viewers to push one's performance

Because the layouts of video and channel pages were self-explanatory, contributing users did not have to ask viewers to comment on their videos, to post video responses, to watch more of their videos, or to subscribe. There are nonetheless a few cases in which contributors emphatically asked viewers for reactions that counted as indices of performance and success on YouTube and in which no other motivation than pushing one's success level is plausible. Paul Robinett, for example, copy-pasted the following line into the video descriptions of most of his videos in 2007: "PLEASE leave a comment. To be the first to see what's next... PLEASE SUBSCRIBE. Just click the orange button above this text... YOU JUST MADE MY DAY... Thank you:)." ⁹⁹ Such tactics became commonplace on YouTube in more recent years (Schumacher 166–167).

Spreading the videos

The term "viral video" has "emerged to describe the phenomenon in which video clips become highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution via the Internet" (Burgess 101). Viral videos were a prominent topic in news media (Kornblum, "Now Playing on YouTube"; Feuer and George) and some of the YouTube scholarship (Burgess; Marek 78–81). The "Share," "Blog," and "Embed" functions facilitated videos going viral. They were primarily designated for viewers of videos, not so much for their uploaders (see p. 32). By analogy, in the YouTube research not the users who contributed the videos but other YouTube users or visitors are typically assumed to be responsible for the popularization of a video through sharing and similar operations (e.g. Burgess 101, 104; Marek 80). Use of such operations is spearheaded as an indication of viewers being 'more' than viewers, of being participants (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 57).

⁹⁹ See e.g. video page of *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment* archived on Oct. 31, 2007.

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YouTube monitored clicks from other websites that linked to a video. The five linking pages that generated the most clicks were displayed on video pages for some time in 2006 and 2007 (Fig. 7.3.11). I looked at the “Sites Linking to This Video” data of several popular videos for which video pages were archived during this time and followed the links to get an idea about who the people were that instigated the largest numbers of external views for videos (Table 7.3). Looking at the data suggests that the contributing users themselves were significant sharers of their videos, for example on their own MySpace profiles or text blogs (see Fig. 7.3.11).

User name	Video title (Internet Archive date)	Overall views from top five linking pages	Views from pages run by the user
BOWIECHICK	<i>Weird arms</i> (26 Feb. 2007)	68	0
EMOKID21OHIO	<i>My First Video Blog</i> (25 Feb. 2007)	3721	0
THEWINEKONE	<i>Internet Recognition</i> (23 June 2006)	495	329
BROOKERS	<i>My united states of... WHATEVA !!!</i> (17 June 2006)	11,128	8,644
LONELYGIRL15	<i>First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails</i> (31 Aug. 2006)	2626	2626
MORBECK	<i>My nipples are hard</i> (23 Nov. 2007)	531	167
SMOSH	<i>Smosh Short 2: Stranded</i> (22 Sept. 2006)	3,315	2,465
TAYZONDAY	<i>“Chocolate Rain” Original Song by Tay Zonday</i> (26 Dec. 2007)	55,599	12,633

Table 7.3 Numbers of views from the top five pages linking to videos, and numbers of views from pages that were run by the contributing users themselves.

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7.3.11 Cropped screenshot of the video page of THEWINEKONE's *Internet Recognition* showing a box that ranked web pages linking to the video (Internet Archive, 23 June 2006).

For Melody Oliveria numbers of views did not (initially) matter, according to her own statement (*BowieChick on BowieChick*), which explains that in the case of *Weird arms* other people's sharing really accounted for all the top five positions of external pages linking to her video. For Ben Johnson (EMOKID21OHIO) all attempts to spread *My First Video Blog* would have marred the authenticity of the moody character he was playing, who could not care less if he was popular or not.

In the cases of all other videos, contributing users' own sharing activities on profiles or websites run by themselves accounted for positions among the top linking pages. In the cases of the THEWINEKONE, BROOKERS, LONELYGIRL15, and SMOSH videos, clicks from such profiles/sites provided more views than clicks from other top linking pages.

Even though it is not part of the corpus, "*Chocolate Rain*" *Original Song by Tay Zonday* is listed here because it is one of two examples of viral videos in Burgess's article on the phenomenon. Even in the case of this video, the vlogger's own link on his website chocolate-rain.com instigated about a quarter of the top external views. The impression of success by viral distribution through ordinary viewers (101) can be further relativized if we take into account that another 12,743 clicks came from a link at people.com, a mainstream celebrity news site.

Video contributors' own "Crossmarketing" activities (Schumacher 167) deserve a higher assessment as a factor that is responsible for the success of viral videos. At the same time, the active 'participation' of viewers needs a lower assessment.

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Clones

Roman Marek argues that unauthorized download of videos and subsequent upload to one's own channel on YouTube or another platform plays an important role in online video culture. He refers to such activities as cloning (80-82).

During corpus formation I searched for clones of videos from several channels that were listed on the archived 'Most Subscribed' rankings but that had either been closed down or that did not hold videos from the time of interest anymore (e.g. FILTHYWHORE and EMMALINA). Unfortunately, the results – on and off YouTube – were meager or nil.

In order to engage with Marek's argument, I took *Smosh Short 1: Dolls* as a test case. I found 11 clones of the video uploaded by others to YouTube or to other platforms.¹⁰⁰ The video had 8,446,188 million views on SMOSH at the time, thus compared to watching, cloning appears to have been a minuscule form of engaging with videos. It also seems to have fallen into account only in the cases of extremely successful videos: After all, there was only a single clone for every 767,835 views. The numbers of views of the clones ranged between 10 and 4000 – mere fractions of the millions of views generated by the original video on SMOSH.

At the same time, I found 6 clones uploaded by Hecox and Padilla themselves to other platforms. Taken together, the clones uploaded by others did not generate as many views as Hecox/Padilla's own upload of their video to one of these platforms, to Metacafe, which generated 53,069 views. Accordingly, as in the case of sharing, contributors' own 'cloning' activities deserve a higher assessment with regards to the exposure of their videos.

Sustaining viewers

The prime way of sustaining viewers was the ongoing production of new videos: By subscribing, viewers expressed that more videos was what they wanted. By producing and uploading further videos, contrib-

¹⁰⁰ Google Video search for Smosh + Short + Dolls on September 1, 2014. Before searching I logged out and deleted the search history, cookies, and cache. I considered search results until some time after no valid results showed up anymore, which was the case after 440 results.

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uting users served this demand. Apart from that, a couple of techniques of explicit viewership maintenance emerged.

A few vloggers from the corpus listed names of dedicated viewers in shout-out sequences. Morbeck was creative in this regard as in others. In *Filthy Whore's breasts* he introduced the memory board (Figs. 7.3.12-13), performing as Chipmunk Chick:

Today, I would like to start by thanking some of my fans. I did something special for you. I'm making this thing called memory board with the names of my fans, of the people that I like the most. DrunkenSnowGirl: I heart you. Tierney. Candice259. Catherine.

Morbeck had less than 100 subscribers in early May 2006. FILTHYWHORE had over 1000.¹⁰¹ Because she was more successful, she qualified as a dedicated topic for the video. The users who went to the memory board (e.g. DRUNKENSNOWGIRL and CANDICE259) did not upload videos or had fewer subscribers than Morbeck and were addressed or spoken about as “fans” in the video. Still, they became part of the picture – even of the mise-en-scene – in a limited way.



7.3.12-13 The introduction of the “memory board” onto which Morbeck (performing as Chipmunk Chick) posted the names of “fans” (*Filthy Whore's breasts*).

¹⁰¹ He celebrated 100 subscribers a couple of days later in *YouTube News*. FILTHYWHORE had 1469 subscribers in the ranking archived on May 17, about two weeks later.

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Unsurprisingly, there were practical limits to the use of shout-out sequences with growing success. Many of Morbeck's fans wanted to be added to the memory board. About four months later, in *Impersonation Contest*, Morbeck stopped mentioning individual names and discontinued the Memory Board. He merely held up a scrap of paper on which he had written "YouTubers" and said: "I heart you all" (Fig. 7.3.14).

It is interesting to see that the video in which Morbeck introduced shout-outs and the Memory Board was also the first in which he assumed the identity of a production company in an opening title sequence: "Bitch Productions" (see Fig. 2.1.17). Listing the names of "fans" must therefore not be misunderstood as a form of personal communication between equals but can be understood as a form of maintaining good relations between video producer/distributor/exhibitors and their viewers.



7.3.14 Morbeck's *Impersonation Contest* uploaded on August 30, in which he stopped individually mentioning fans' names and discontinued the Memory Board.

Several vloggers celebrated reaching landmark numbers of subscribers or other goals and said thank you (see also Burgess and Green, "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 99). Morbeck celebrated 100 (*YouTube News*), 300 (*YouTube News - Second Edition*), and 1000 subscribers (*My nipples are hard*) in May and June 2006. In the video celebrating 300 subscribers he proposed a toast, performing as Chipmunk Chick: "I would like to propose a toast to all of you and celebrate our achievement" (Fig. 7.3.15). When he reached 2600 subscribers, Nate Burr created a music video for video game music from the Atari 2600 con-

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sole, a video in which he used title cards to address his subscribers: “So thank you to each and every subscriber... [...] Thanks people, Glad I can entertain :)” (2600).



7.3.15 Chipmunk Chick raises the glass to celebrate “nearly 300 subscribers” (*YouTube News - Second Edition*).

After securing her deal with Carson Daly (see p. 65), Brooke Brodack uploaded a video in which she addressed her viewership:

I wanted to thank everybody who has watched my videos and who has supported me and all my fans. You know what, no, you’re not even like fans, you’re like really good friends. So I want to thank all the friends that I’ve made on YouTube, because you guys have brought me to where I am right now. (*Everything Changes*)

In practice, the association was that between an artist or star, and her viewership or fans. Nevertheless, Brodack felt that she could not explicitly say it in this manner, so she corrected herself saying her fans were “like really good friends.”

A form of viewership maintenance that became common after the time of interest was signaling responsiveness and interactivity. By this I mean selective emphatic references to comments, video responses, and messages in videos, even soliciting suggestions of topics for future videos. Already during the time of interest it became clear that replying to all comments and video responses was not required of successful video contributors from their viewers (see 7.5 section “Reciprocal activity”). However, signaling responsiveness and interactivity could be an effective tool of maintaining the viewer base. Burgess and

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Green treat several more recent channels, like HOTFORWORDS and WHATTHEBUCKSHOW, on which this was practiced. However, they speak of such references as “reciprocal activity” within YouTube’s “participatory culture” and “community” of users (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105). Looking at the selectivity and low numbers of contributing users’ reactions to comments and video responses (e.g. HOTFORWORDS, *Break a leg* on) suggests that this characterization is hardly justified.

Manipulating the metrics

In fall 2006 several video contributors were said to be manipulating the metrics that measured video and user performance. Among others, Stevie Ryan (LITTLELOCA) and Lisa Donovan (LISANOVA) were accused of opening dummy accounts to boost their video views, comments, ratings, and channel subscriptions. No videos could be found on such channels, and all viewer activities were dedicated to the channels of the accused users. Another point of contention were browser plug-ins that automatically reloaded a video page after a while and thus increased its view count while a manipulating user was logged in with a dummy account. The evidence that those who denounced Ryan and Donovan collected is convincing.¹⁰² YouTube Inc. reacted by improving the backend of the platform to prevent such abuse (see e.g. *YouTube Blog*, 13 March 2009).

Interestingly, both Ryan and Donovan had accused others of ‘cheating’ before. *Re: YouTube CHEATERS!*, the video that illustrated how Ryan manipulated the metrics, was a video response to her own *YouTube CHEATERS!* which is no longer online for obvious reasons.¹⁰³ In the history of stardom there is a concurrence of an acknowledgment of the “constructedness of stars” and of the claim that a particular star is “authentic” and truly carrying “star quality.” Richard Dyer illustrates the employment of this rhetoric in his discussion of the movie *A Star is Born* (138). Such rhetoric was at work in all videos denouncing ‘cheaters.’ While denouncing others and their methods of

¹⁰² See the videos *Re: YouTube CHEATERS!* on RIGHTBACKATYOU2 and *Calling out the real cheaters!* on MALICIOUSKID18.

¹⁰³ Video page http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIRu0_ErCvQ, Internet Archive, 21 Nov. 2006.

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cheating – the constructedness of their success, if you will – a user at the same time asserted the rightfulness of her or his own success. Nate Burr, for example, ranted about other users' manipulation of the metrics while claiming that he "earned" his "place on the Most Subscribed of All Time" ranking in the video *YouTube SCAMMING*. The cases of Stevie Ryan and Lisa Donovan suggest that there is no exit from the fact of the constructedness of stars on YouTube and elsewhere but rather an endless progression of layers of exposing constructedness and simultaneously authenticating 'genuine' stardom (Dyer 136-137).

Which parameters and longevity of performance were relevant when ad revenue sharing was introduced?

In 2007 YouTube Inc. introduced the Partner Program through which the company offered a share of advertising revenues to some of the successful 'home-grown' contributing users of the platform.¹⁰⁴ On-site performance was crucial for the selection of users.

Contextualizing the system of evaluations and rankings with mass media and popular culture at large, the monetization of YouTube videos does not look like a commercialization of the service in the follow-up of the Google takeover, as van Dijck surmises (cf. 12, 126-127). It rather seems that monetization was prefigured by or inscribed into the system already in 2005 and 2006 and merely yet-to-be-implemented at the time. Tellingly, when monetization was first announced by one of YouTube's co-founders at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2007, Paul Robinett said that he did not "understand why that would be a big surprise to anybody." He said: "One of my videos has like over three million views. [...] I guess that's worth something" (*Money, Money, Money, Money... Money is coming to YouTube*).

Which parameters and longevity of performance became relevant for the selection of users to benefit from revenue sharing, according to YouTube's own statements, when the program was implemented in spring 2007?

¹⁰⁴ According to YouTube's own statements, "thousands of mid-sized to large content creators who range from video game companies to universities to production houses" had benefited from ad revenue sharing for a longer time, but this became public only in the context of the announcement of the Partner Program and only as an aside (*YouTube Blog*, 3 May 2007).

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Initial user participants have been selected from the content creators that you have helped popularize by watching their videos and subscribing to their channels. Because they have built and sustained large, persistent audiences through the creation of engaging videos, their content has become attractive for advertisers, which has helped them earn the opportunity to participate on YouTube as a partner. (*YouTube Blog*, 3 May 2007)

When the program was opened to applications towards the end of the year, YouTube emphasized its criteria in another blog post, according to which the program was intended to “reward” those

who are regularly uploading original content to YouTube. In evaluating applications, we will focus on the users who have built a significant audience on YouTube (as measured by video views, subscribers, etc.) and who consistently comply with the [YouTube Terms of Use](#). (*YouTube Blog*, 10 Dec. 2007)

For obvious legal reasons, users could only monetize “original” videos, that is videos they had created themselves, or videos for which they had been granted monetization rights from a third party who owned the copyright. Videos also had to be in compliance with the “Terms of Use.” Users’ contribution of such videos had to be regular and not sporadic or one-off.¹⁰⁵ Views – and not comments, video responses, or positive evaluations – became the prime parameters of video performance that qualified video contributors for revenue sharing. The size and sustainability of a user’s watching “audience” were crucial. Obviously, the actual amount of money ‘Partners’ received depended on the times videos were watched including the advertisement (see Marshall).

All of this situates the YouTube Partner Program in the tradition of monetization in the ‘old’ media worlds of newspaper, film, broadcast and cable television. As I have previously shown (chapters 1.2 and 7.2), user operations and the overall system into which users and videos were placed heavily depended on these ‘old’ media from early on. Thus monetization was not a break from the early days of the platform (van Dijck 126–127; Stembeck) but in continuity.

¹⁰⁵ YouTube introduced the monetization of individual viral videos only later.

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The ongoing production of original videos and building and sustaining large viewer bases eventually proved financially rewarding for video contributors – video bloggers and others – who aimed for this kind of success. The users of LONELYGIRL15, RENETTO, SMOSH, LISANOVA (*YouTube Blog*, 3 May 2007), and BLUNTY3000 (Interview by Tim Burrowes) were among the first that became “Partners”. Those of MORBECK (*My YouTube Story / Morbeck*) and THEWINEKONE (“Tony Huynh,” *Wikipedia*) followed a little later.

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing

There is no dedicated treatment of receiving money for creating or showing videos on YouTube in the time before the Partner Program was introduced in spring 2007. Burgess and Green illustrate the importance of vlogging for ad revenues – of “entrepreneurial vloggers” – among the contributors of YouTube’s most popular content in late 2007 (96-101). It remains open what happened before, but the authors suggest that the work of entrepreneurial vloggers was “grounded in [the] ordinary, creative practice” of “YouTube’s ‘grassroots’ culture,” which sounds anything but commercial (91, 96; similarly: van Dijck 115, 127). While monetization is not a dedicated focus of the ethnographic study Patricia Lange conducted between July 2006 and August 2008, an important finding is that many successful users had “important connections to professional or at least advanced-amateur media making” and that the ambitions and career plans of those who didn’t, frequently changed with growing success on YouTube (“(Mis-)conceptions” 90-91).

Interestingly, the first videos uploaded to BROOKERS and THEWINEKONE each contain a joke about product placement. Towards the end of *EmoSpace* Brodack shows off a pack of Minute Rice to the camera, joking about all-too-obvious product placement in film and on television (Fig. 5.1.21). In the “director’s commentary” of *The Delaware Boy* Tony Huynh ironically confesses that a shot of empty bottles of random cleaning products in a forest (that was probably compiled by playing children) was actually “a blatant display of advertising.” Because “Coca Cola, Nike,” and “McDonald’s” did “not return” his “calls,” he had to

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing

work with companies producing “cleaning products.” Both videos were uploaded in 2005 when YouTube was merely one video hosting startup among several and had not generated headlines of its own, nor had individual vloggers. The humorous tone of the products’ treatments further suggests that these are not actual examples of product placement. Nevertheless, these videos by first-time video contributors from 2005 illustrate that from the very onset receiving money for the production or exhibition of videos was on the horizon of possibilities. Receiving money for videos was thinkable, if you will. Probably there was never an era of pure non-commercial grassroots media practice on YouTube.

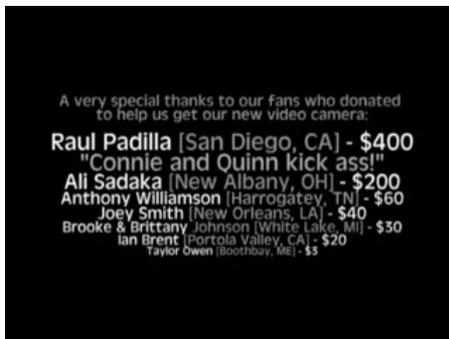
In this chapter, I present the ways in which video contributors turned their skills and YouTube success into money before YouTube introduced the Partner Program in spring 2007. My research of monetization in early YouTube culture shows that from early on users found ways to monetize their videos or to commercially benefit from their YouTube success otherwise.

However, before that I want to briefly address emphatic pronouncements about the non-commercial or even ‘community’ motivation of video production and distribution and of denouncing other users for ‘selling out.’ Several users from the corpus made statements in these regards, among others Melody Oliveria, Paul Robinett, and Nate Burr.¹⁰⁶ Similar statements are sometimes taken at face value (e.g. in van Dijck 126-127; Tufnell), and I suggest that this is problematic. First of all, monetization was an issue for which speech was highly regulated in YouTube culture (Schumacher 167). Secondly, like referring to other users and their videos in general, such statements usually went ‘up’ the rankings: Envy over not enjoying the same benefits as more successful users seems to be involved in such statements. Thirdly, all of the mentioned users were either already monetizing their videos without acknowledging it or would monetize their videos at a later point with or without acknowledging it, as can be seen in the following. It should be added that such statements were far from ubiquitous.

¹⁰⁶ BOWIECHICK, *BowieChick on BowieChick*; BLUNTY3000, *Comic-al ... POOS and YouTube SCAMMING*; RENETTO, *Who are you*.

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing

A couple of video contributors solicited **donations from dedicated viewers**. It is not clear whether SMOSH asked viewers for donations on YouTube or on their smosh.com website. In any case they were able to thank “fans” for donating a total of \$ 1006 in the closing title sequences of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* and *Transformers Theme* uploaded in January and March 2006 (Figs. 7.4.1-2). Some of the donations were apparently called for to support an upgrade of the equipment: buying a “new video camera.” Other donations were not bound to a specific purpose. It is interesting to see how personal funding and crowd funding intersected in the case of SMOSH: While no family, friendship, or local ties are apparent for most of the donors, Raul Padilla – probably a relative of Anthony Padilla’s – donated the biggest amount for the camera (Fig. 7.4.1).



7.4.1-2 SMOSH say “thanks” for donations from “fans” in the closing title sequences of *Turtles Theme* and *Transformers Theme*.

At the beginning of Morbeck’s *My addiction*, uploaded in mid-May 2006, the character Alicia complains that Chipmunk Chick and herself are “starving” and asks viewers to go to Morbeck’s text blog to make a “donation” (Fig. 7.4.3). An archived version of the blog shows that donations were processed by PayPal (Fig. 7.4.4). Morbeck was not among the most subscribed users of the platform by this time yet, which means that he started monetizing his work from a relatively moderate level of success on.

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing



BLOGGing (In)sanity

Chipmunk Chick Video Blogs, parodies of You Tube users, music videos and others. If you want to make a donation to help with my video productions click on one of the buttons below. You know you want to, any amount :)



7.4.3-4 Morbeck – represented by one of his characters – asks viewers for donations in a video. The call for donations on his blog (*BLOGGing (In)sanity*, Internet Archive, 27 June 2006).

In the corpus there are individual cases of users who created **commissioned videos**. In order to pay for his girlfriend to move from the US to Australia, Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) decided to “whore out” in fall 2006. Commissioned videos were one of “a bunch of ways” that he came up with “to bring in the cash”:

Want to request a video of me doing something you’d find amusing? or stupid? Ask, name a price I can’t refuse and you’ll see it. Wanna see me shave my head? dare me to get my (very hairy) man legs waxed? Want to see me write your name on a piece of paper – and staple it to myself? [...] I’ve created a new youtube channel called “[BluntPimp](#)” where these “video stunts” will be uploaded for all to see – or if you prefer, set to private for your personal viewing only. (Bluntmation.com, Internet Archive, 4 Nov. 2006)

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing

Only a month before, Burr had professed that he was not creating videos “for a buck” in the video *Comic-al ... POOS*. Unfortunately, the channel to which the “stunts” were uploaded is no longer online.

Probably because the company YouTube itself was running and slowly expanding advertising on the platform (see McDonald 388-91), it did not support or even inhibited users’ own initiatives to run **advertising in videos, on video pages or channel pages**. Morbeck’s advertising of a retail website in *YouTube reality TV* is a rare example of acknowledged advertising in a YouTube video in 2005 and 2006. Unrelated to the video’s topic, Chipmunk Chick says at the beginning of the video: “Ohh my god, Im getting paid to do advertising. You totally have to check this website: www.spoofee.com.” Obviously, Morbeck sold advertising ‘space’ in the video to the owners of a website.

Straight-out **advertising** can typically only be **found on contributors’ own websites**. Hecox and Padilla were already running banner ads on smosh.com before starting to upload videos to YouTube (see chapter 2.1). It appears that the deals were made between themselves and the companies that wanted to advertise without a proxy. On her website BowieChick, Melody Oliveria ran advertising provided by Google Ads at least since May 2006, as an archived version of her website shows (11 May 2006). Google was very successful in soliciting advertising for bloggers and owners of small websites. Companies willing to advertise paid Google, and Google paid bloggers or site owners where ads were shown. In December 2006 advertisement solicited by the makers of LONELYGIRL15 on their lonelygirl15.com website generated about \$10,000 per month (Davis).

There is a grey area of various kinds of **unacknowledged or partially acknowledged product marketing in YouTube videos** in which commercial products are shown or talked about. Compensation happened in the form of free products or money.

Melody Oliveria received a Logitech product of her choice for speaking about the QuickCam she used to create matte effects. According to her own and to statements from Logitech, mentioning the product was not called-for by the company and the gift merely an act of gratitude for the sales increase the company was able trace back to the BOWIE-CHICK video *My webcam* (Sandoval).

William Sledd worked in a Gap store in Paducah, Kentucky, when starting to give fashion advice on the YouTube channel WILLIAMSLEDD in summer 2006. He mentioned various products and brands in his videos, but according to his own statements, he neither received com-

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pensation nor free products from Gap or other companies (*The Truth About William Sledd*).

Nate Burr started to review gaming consoles in late 2006 and expanded these activities to photo, video, and other electronic devices later. It is likely that he received some compensation for drawing attention to these products, while he did not speak about any.

The use of YouTube for such forms of product marketing was only just beginning in late 2006 and massively expanded afterwards (see also Lange, “(Mis)conceptions” 91-92). Julia Schumacher demonstrates that YouTube users take care to appear as ordinary opinionated consumers and not as representatives of a company in such videos (167). Accordingly, discussing the veracity of all the above claims about not being compensated for the presentation of products would not lead anywhere.



7.4.5 Bree shows off a packet of Ice Breakers Sours Gum to Daniel – and to viewers (*Truckstop Reunion*).

Interestingly, **regular product placement** – that is, the seamless integration of a product into the mise-en-scene of the audiovisual material – does not appear to have been a prime product marketing strategy, in spite of Brodack’s and Huynh’s jokes in their first videos. The main reason for this is probably the prominence of diegetic narration in videos both on regular and unacknowledged fictional vlogs and their high degree of reflexivity on different levels. These qualities made explicit references to products much more plausible than seamless embedding. Accordingly, when the trio running LONELYGIRL15 signed a one-off product placement deal with Hershey’s in April 2007, the implementation in the video *Truckstop Reunion* looked very much unlike

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product placement in film and on television (Fig. 7.4.5). In the video Daniel asks what kind of sweets Bree is eating. She shows the package off to him – who is operating the camera – and to viewers. She also mentions the sweets' name: "Ice Breakers Sours Gum." A playful banter ensues over giving Daniel and Jonas a piece of gum.



7.4.6 SMOSH advertise their own branded products at the end of *Transformers Theme*.

A couple of video contributors sold **branded products** that were related to their channels. Hecox and Padilla, for example, attached an ad for T-shirts to the end of *Transformers Theme* (Fig. 7.4.6). Fans could choose between different SMOSH shirt designs on their website ("Smosh Store," Internet Archive, 5 April 2006). Shirts could be paid via PayPal or by sending a check to Hecox by mail. The vloggers packaged and globally shipped the shirts themselves (see IANH, *A Day in the Life of Smosh #4*). The vlogger of FILTHYWHORE also sold branded clothing on her website 'Filthy Whore Exposed!' (Internet Archive, 26 May 2006).

From about mid-2006 on, high profile YouTube contributors started **releasing videos via outlets that offered financial rewards**. Brooke Brodack's deal with Carson Daly in May 2006 to produce content for multiple outlets has already been mentioned.

Some time after their 'unveiling' in September, the makers of LONELYGIRL15 announced that they would be releasing videos via Revver, an online video platform also founded in 2005 which was similar to YouTube but offered advertising revenue sharing to all contributors of original videos (Borland). New videos were first shown on Revver and on the lonelygirl15.com website before they were uploaded to You-

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Tube. The lonelygirl15.com site linked to Revver and not to YouTube (Munarriz).

Towards the end of 2006, LiveVideo deliberately targeted successful YouTube contributors to release videos on the competing platform. Hecox and Padilla struck a “sponsorship deal” with LiveVideo (Munarriz). They uploaded older SMOSH videos in October. Several of their future videos, like *Frankie Rogers is James Bond*, were first released on LiveVideo and smosh.com and only later on YouTube.¹⁰⁷ In the opening titles, these videos also announced: “Smosh videos powered by LiveVideo.com.” Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) and Ben Going (BOH3M3) were among the other successful vloggers who also began releasing videos on LiveVideo, albeit not much is known about their terms.

For some contributing users, their success on YouTube opened doors to **commercial opportunities that did not primarily involve the production of videos**.

As early as 2005, a user whose name will not be mentioned in this case, had an interview with Steve Chen, one of YouTube’s co-founders, for a job as a “community manager.” He/She did not take the job because he/she “did not feel ready to move [...] to San Francisco at the time” (Email communication 2010).

In July 2006 Smoothie King hired Hecox and Padilla as “casting directors” for their “X-Treme Casting Call,” which was a contest for users to create and upload videos related to the soft drink brand and win various prizes. In November the duo took on a similar assignment from the webcam manufacturer Logitech to promote the company’s ‘How Not To’ video contest. Various companies created such contests for “corporation-sanctioned user-generated content” during the next couple of years, contests which offered “free advertising” for the companies and “(limited) exposure” for the contributing users (Wasko and Erickson 381). As the SMOSH examples show, successful YouTube users played a different part in these marketing campaigns than other users. As a part of the second assignment, Hecox and Padilla also created the video *How Not to Make a First Impression* which was not an entry for the contest but a commissioned video to promote the contest.

¹⁰⁷ See their SMOSH channel on LiveVideo (Internet Archive, 11 Dec. 2006).

7.4 Monetization before the introduction of ad revenue sharing

YouTube presented the introduction of the Partner Program as a generous act of gratitude to its ‘home-grown’ creators and uploaders of videos (*YouTube Blog*, 3 May 2007). However, the timing of the introduction suggests more than a coincidental relation to successful users’ previous moves to outlets that offered revenue sharing or other sorts of financial compensation. LONELYGIRL15, SMOSH, GERIATRIC1927, and BROOKERS – the users on the top 4 positions of the ‘Most Subscribed’ ranking around the time when the program was first announced in Davos in January (see Internet Archive, 5 Jan. 2007) – had all started releasing videos via outlets that offered such opportunities.

YouTube’s Partner Program was ultimately successful in winning successful video contributors back. Hecox and Padilla, for example, stopped releasing videos on LiveVideo.com with the introduction of revenue sharing on YouTube. The makers of LONELYGIRL15 were slower to win back (Munarriz). Both continued to heavily advertise on their own websites though. The program made further dedicated YouTube projects possible (see Burgess and Green, “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 104). The introduction of the Partner Program was also crucial in outcompeting Revver and LiveVideo. In 2008 MySpace-owned LiveVideo could buy the struggling Revver for less than \$ 5 Million (Duncan). Just to call back to mind, Google had to pay \$ 1650 Million for YouTube in 2006. Today, both LiveVideo and Revver are defunct. The introduction of revenue sharing on YouTube led to the demise of these sites because they merely had a fraction of YouTube’s traffic (see Robinett in *Money, Money, Money... Money is coming to YouTube*). Uploading videos to these platforms was not interesting anymore with the devaluation of their single distinguishing asset: monetization of videos. In retrospect, Revver and LiveVideo were too early when they began compensating video contributors because they did not have a large viewership at the time, which would have been crucial in order to attract significant numbers of advertisers and to have ‘something’ to ‘share’ with users who created and uploaded videos (see also Snickars and Vonderau 11).

7.5 How much response was out there, and how much reciprocal activity?

This chapter will investigate the actual extent of response – primarily in the form of comments and video responses – to the videos of the corpus and the extent of reciprocal activity between users. This is the final element of my challenge to the arguments about “inter-creative” ‘participants’ on a “continuum of cultural participation” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54, 57), about videos as vehicles of communication and social networking, and about a community of YouTube users. Response attested to by “numbers of comments and video responses” (*YouTube* 54) and “reciprocal activity,” for example between YouTube “stars” and other users, (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105) are central elements in these arguments.

Response to videos

I calculated the average ratio of ‘views: comments : video responses’ of ten diverse videos from the corpus. In order to do this, I established the numbers of views, comments, and ‘official’ video responses by looking at versions of these videos’ pages archived not too long after the end of the time of interest. Because not all video pages were archived – not to mention regularly – taking the same date for every video was not possible. I counted ‘official’ video responses but I also searched for and counted further video responses. A video appeared as an ‘official’ video response on the video page of another video if a user specified a video of his as a video response in the Video Response box on the other video’s page and if the uploader of the other video approved of the request. I correctly assumed that there were more than the ‘official’ video responses on the platform either because a referring user did not specify a related video as a video response using the box or because the referred-to user did not approve of the posting. Such ‘unofficial’ video responses were likely to quote the user name and video title of the referred-to video in their own title or use respective tags; they could thus be found through a YouTube search for user name and video title. Of the search results I only counted those videos as video responses that also established a relation to the referred-to video on the level of the audiovisual material. The average ratio ‘views : comments : video responses (‘official’ and ‘unofficial’)’ for

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the ten videos was 63,000 : 180 : 1.¹⁰⁸ I want to look at three of these videos and the response they received in detail.

In terms of its performance, *Smosh Short 1: Dolls* is an average SMOSH video posted in late April 2006 which qualifies it as an example of a video from at the time successful video bloggers. The video had 3,271,460 views, 8446 comments, and 0 'official' video responses on March 21, 2007 (Internet Archive). Among the search results for "smosh," "short," and "dolls" were 32 related videos, most of them reenactments, and most of them from 2005 and 2006.¹⁰⁹ The ratio views : comments : video responses (both kinds) was 99135 : 256 : 1.

Who are you....Who, Who...Who, Who is an example of a video in which a vlogger explicitly called for comments and video responses. It is worth mentioning that Robinett's initial question in the video was "Who is watching YouTube?" Apart from defending YouTube and his own YouTube activities against accusations from an offline friend, the video aimed to turn viewers into creators and uploaders. The video had 140,277 views, 1027 comments, and 318 'official' video responses on March 20, 2007 (Internet Archive). It seemed impractical to search for user name and video title and to check if each valid result was not also among the 'official' video responses. Also, because Robinett called for 'official' video responses, it seemed unlikely that others would have created related videos without posting them in the Video Response box or that Robinett did not approve of valid postings. So I estimated that there were about 400 video responses, 'official' and 'unofficial' in total. Compared to *Dolls*, 318 'official' and 400 video responses in total are impressive. Still, only one in a hundred viewers responded to Robinett's request by posting a comment or video response.¹¹⁰ The others merely watched. The ratio 'views : comments : video responses' for *Who are you* was 351 : 2.6 : 1.

¹⁰⁸ A search for 'unofficial' video responses was not possible on archived pages but only on the live version of YouTube. Most likely, a few responses from 2005 and 2006 were deleted since. In order to accommodate for that, I also counted responses that were uploaded after 2005 and 2006. I did not count clones because they were not relevant in the context of discussing response (see p. 334).

¹⁰⁹ Search conducted on February 23, 2014. I looked at search results until some time after no valid results showed up anymore, at 400 search results in the case of this video.

¹¹⁰ $140277/(1027+400)=98.3$

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First Videoblog is an example of a video from a vlogger for whom – apart from showing videos – personal exchange and social networking were aims for using YouTube (see pp. 111-112 and who was not successful on YouTube when posting the video yet. Suppose viewers had inhibitions to actively engage with a video from a successful user: Melody Oliveria could be expected to receive a less drastic discrepancy between views and the different kinds of response. In March 2009 *First Videoblog* had 20,942 views, 128 comments, and 0 ‘official’ video responses.¹¹¹ Searches for “bowiechick,” “first,” and “videoblog,” and for “bowiechick,” “first,” “video,” and “blog” yielded 1 ‘unofficial’ video response.¹¹² Even for a vlogger interested in communication and social networking and not yet successful the ratio of 20,942 : 128 : 1 indicates that hardly any of the people who watched Oliveria’s video got back to her in a comment or video response.

I searched for comments written by other users from the corpus and by further successful users among the comments attracted by the three videos. *Dolls* received a comment written by Oliveria. *Who are you* received a comment from the user of FILTHYWHORE. *First Videoblog* did not receive a comment from another successful or would-be successful user.

I searched for video responses to the three videos among all the videos uploaded by the users from the corpus. Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) uploaded an ‘official’ video response to *Who are you*, but apart from that, no successful or would-be successful video contributor uploaded ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ video responses to the three videos.

This was in line with the unsystematic impression from the long engagement with YouTube videos that users who turned out to be successful contributors of videos did not stick out as particularly active respondents, as writers of comments or posters of video responses that is. There are ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ video responses in the corpus (see p. 315), but they are the exception more than the rule. Of the videos from the core corpus about 16% dedicatedly refer to another user or video, which contradicts Burgess and Green’s argument that videos

¹¹¹ The video page of this video was never archived by the Internet Archive so I looked at the copy I myself had archived on March 13, 2009.

¹¹² Search conducted on January 2, 2014.

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on vlogs “are frequently responses to other vlogs, carrying out discussion across YouTube and directly addressing comments left on previous vlog entries” (54; also Manovich 40).

Reciprocal activity

Reciprocal activity between users is an important element in the argument about videos as vehicles of communication and social network formation and about users as a community, including users from different levels of success.¹¹³ Reciprocal activity in comments and then in video responses will be in view.

Reciprocal activity in comments

In the comment section of a video page, YouTube users could reply to comments left by others by pressing “Reply” buttons next to comments. Replying comments were displayed along with the original comments (Fig. 7.5.1). Of course users could also post comments that referred to previous comments without using this function. Both the user who had contributed the video and other YouTube users could react to comments in these ways. The interface supported exchanges at eye level in this regard.

When archiving videos and video pages, I also archived “All comments” pages for most videos, pages which displayed the first 500-odd comments attracted by videos. Such pages were hardly ever archived by the Internet Archive. Many comments posted to videos called for reactions by explicitly addressing the contributing users. Such users received a notification via Email if another user had posted a comment.

Hecox and Padilla reacted to 2 of the first 518 comments attracted by *Smosh Short 1: Dolls* (accessed 13 March 2009). They used IANH, their second user account, for their reactions:

Get a haircut emo kids, thanks. (HALFCHUCK)

get half a brain halfchuck, thanks. (IANH)

¹¹³ See Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54, 56; “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105; Harley and Fitzpatrick 681; Lange, “(Mis)conceptions” 93, 98.

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Great, more untalented emo kids getting famous. Just what the world needs. (MELFICE101).

Great, more idiots who think long hair constitutes being emo. Quit whining. (IANH)

Only the first comment explicitly addressed the vloggers. The vast majority of comments that did in fact address them, some of them asking a question, did not receive a reaction, for example:

hahaha that was great. so simple yet so funny. HOW DO YOU DO IT!?! (LOSTFEESHES)

Omg! Promise me you'll never quit making videos!! You totally rock! (MAJITA91)

Paul Robinett reacted to 6 of the 760 first comments posted to *Who are you* by posting comments himself. Here is an example of one of these exchanges:

I already gave you a video response! You need to get that damn toothpick and review my cooking videos. (MRCOOK)

Your on my list! (RENETTO)

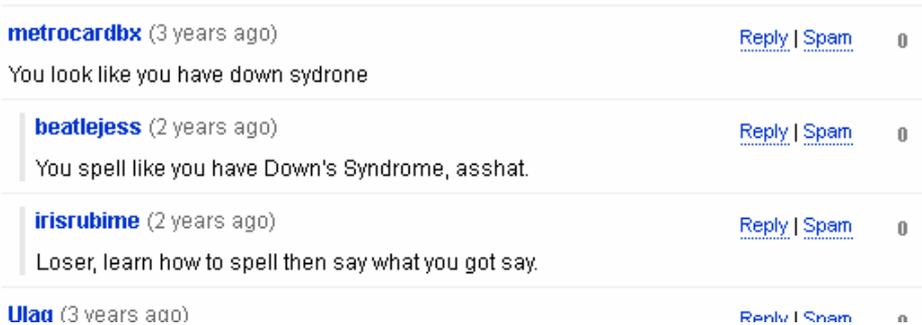
Thank you! (RENETTO)

It is interesting that reciprocal activity itself was the topic of the exchange here: The vlogger of MRCOOK refused to post a video response to *Who are you* because he “already gave” a video response to a RENETTO video – a video response for which an reciprocal act from Robinett was still missing – so he asked Robinett to get “that damn toothpick” in his mouth that he used to alter his voice when reviewing videos and to review a MRCOOK video. At the time of archiving the RENETTO videos, no such review was on the channel. I asked Robinett if he had ever reviewed a MRCOOK video and he responded: “The name sounds familiar but that’s about all I got for you...” (“Re: YouTube research”). He did in fact stop reviewing other users’ videos after posting *Who are you*, arguably because it had been a success strategy for him all along and he was becoming successful himself at the time (see p. 321).

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Taking into account that *Dolls* and *Who are you* attracted large numbers of comments and were posted by users who already were or were about to become very successful, it is – in spite of the argument about a community of users – probably no surprise that there was virtually no reciprocal activity in the comment section between the users who contributed the videos and users who posted comments. How much reciprocal activity was there in the comment section of a video that was only moderately successful and uploaded by a user who was not successful when posting the video yet? Melody Oliveria responded to 3 of the 54 comments attracted by *First Videoblog* during the first year since uploading. She did not respond to any comments posted thereafter (page archived 13 March 2009).

Irrespective of the success level of video and contributing user, then, there was little reciprocal activity in the comment section between the users who had uploaded the videos and those that posted comments in the early days of YouTube, neither through the function provided by the interface for such exchanges nor otherwise.



7.5.1 Cropped screenshot from the “All comments” page of *First Videoblog* (BOWIECHICK), showing a brief exchange (accessed 13 March 2009).

It deserves note that in the case of each of these videos, comment writers reacted to each other’s comments to a limited extent. Defending the uploading user against abuse was the most common reaction (Fig. 7.5.1). I already suggested that commenting and posting video responses were configured as operations for viewers of videos – in spite of the fact that uploaders could also post comments to their videos (p. 31). Interface and use concurred in this regard: Viewers reacted to a

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video in the comment section, and a couple of them reacted to each other's reactions.

Reciprocal activity in video responses

Reciprocal activity could also occur, and is said to occur (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54; "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 105; Harley and Fitzpatrick 681; Manovich 42), in 'official' and 'unofficial' video responses.

The vloggers of SMOSH did not upload a video that referred to one of the video responses attracted by *Dolls*. In fact, they never responded to a video response to one of their videos uploaded in 2005 and 2006 using either of their SMOSH or IANH accounts.

Of the 314 official video responses attracted by Paul Robinett's *Who are you*, a single response became the object of a reciprocal act in another video. Robinett mentions Peter Oakley's *Re: Who are you... Who, Who...Who, Who* (GERIATRIC1927) in his own *This Is YouTube at its best!* It is worthwhile to look at this reciprocal exchange a little closer. When Robinett reacted to Oakley's video response, it had already been online for three days. Robinett only reacted after YouTube had 'featured' one of Oakley's videos and the pensioner had become an overnight YouTube sensation, drowning in comments, messages, and subscriptions. In fact, *This Is YouTube at its best!* was posted as a video response to Oakley's *Telling it all part 1*, in which Oakley talks about his recent success. Oakley uploaded *Telling it all part 1* on August 11, 2006 in the morning, British time. Robinett uploaded *This Is YouTube at its best!* on the morning of the same day, American time, and quoted parts of the video. Only his recent success made Oakley eligible for a reciprocal act.

Melody Oliveria did not react to the only video response *First Videoblog* attracted by posting a video using or not using the Video Response function. She did post a brief comment to the other user's video though: "Oh gosh... Funny" (MATTIMUSREX, *Videoblog #1*).

In general, reciprocal activity in 'official' and other video responses was the exception and not the rule on successful regular video blogs in 2005 and 2006. The rare reciprocal exchanges were short. The by far longest exchange involving a vlogger from the corpus occurred be-

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tween the vloggers of THEWINEKONE and PAYTOTHEORDEROF2 and lasted five videos (see p. 287).¹¹⁴

To a certain extent, reciprocal activity through video responses was a characteristic of unacknowledged fictional video blogs run by the same people. The majority of videos uploaded by the creators of EMO-KID21OHIO and EMOGIRL21 – who were fellow university students and ran these channels in collaboration – referred to each other. This was before the introduction of the Video Response function, but video titles like *Angry message to EmoGirl21* (EMOKID21OHIO), *To Emokid21Ohio* (EMOGIRL21), and *MTVu, Forgiving Emo Girl* (EMOKID21OHIO) and references in the videos themselves account for this reciprocal activity which happened within a fictional world that involved videos, channels, and the space in between.

There was more reciprocal activity between LONELYGIRL15 and DANIELBEAST than between regular video blogs and between these unacknowledged fictional vlogs and regular vlogs at all times. As soon as the channels of the project had a following by themselves, the fictional vlogger characters virtually stopped referring to individual users not part of the storyworld. Instead, they employed the rhetorical “[a] lot of you guys have been asking” phrase (e.g. in LONELYGIRL15, *The Danielbeast*; see also Flemming). Especially after they were found out, the producers increased reciprocal activity through ‘official’ video responses between these channels and further channels introduced to the storyworld (see Kuhn, “YouTube als Loopingbahn” 128-130). In the table below, I have traced an exchange from October 2006 involving four videos (Table 6.5.1). The last video introduced Gemma, a new character ‘running’ a new channel (GEMMERS19), to the storyworld. Her first video had to be posted and approved of as a video response to a LONELYGIRL15 or DANIELBEAST video – for otherwise no one would have noticed and recognized her as a character of the series.

¹¹⁴ Perhaps it needs to be repeated that – while they have generally been interpreted as such – references between videos did not necessarily involve communicative acts between the involved users (see pp. 318-319). It is possible to challenge the social media argument qualitatively (7.3) and quantitatively (7.5).

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LONELYGIRL15, *I Completed the Ceremony!*, 13 October (Internet Archive, 7 Nov 2006)

← video response to ←

DANIELBEAST, *Following the Helper*, 15 October (Internet Archive, 1 Feb. 2007)

← video response to ←

LONELYGIRL15, *Daniel, Be Careful*, 17 October (Internet Archive, 7 Feb. 2007)

← video response to ←

GEMMERS19, *Nut Kills Man*, 19 October (Internet Archive, 31 Oct. 2006)

Table 6.5.1. Video response exchange between channels of the LONELYGIRL15 storyworld.

The most and the best reciprocal activity in the videos from the corpus was part of fictional worlds. The reciprocal communicative ideal that Burgess and Green (“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105), Lange (93), and Harley and Fitzpatrick (681) project onto YouTube culture was reality mostly in fiction. Moreover, in the cases of both EMOKID21-OHIO/EMOGIRL21 and the characters of the LONELYGIRL15 storyworld, reciprocal online activity depended on local and offline communication and collaboration between the people running these channels.

Conclusion: Showing Videos, Watching Videos

Chapter 7 set out to study the 'life' of the videos from the corpus on the platform. It studied what happened to videos once they were uploaded to YouTube. The activities of the users uploading the videos and of other YouTube users and visitors were in view. I want to conclude this chapter by condensing the main results in the context of the two arguments that provided a background for the analysis.

A participatory culture?

The study of interface (1.2 and 7.2) and user activities (2.1 and 7) did not provide evidence that it is "helpful to shift from thinking about media production, distribution, and consumption to thinking about YouTube in terms of a continuum of cultural participation" when making sense of YouTube (cf. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 57). The historically specifying variant – the argument about a transformation of a platform for and used by 'producers' in the early years to a medium of distribution/exhibition and 'mere' viewing or consumption of videos from 2007 on (van Dijck 114-116) – could also be challenged: There was little evidence of "inter-creative" users (Burgess and Green 54) whose "roles" were "constantly in flux" (Lange, "(Mis)conceptions" 98) and of a 'circulation' of videos on the platform (Marek 75) in 2005 and 2006. Instead, it occurred that production, distribution/exhibition, and viewership are apt terms to understand YouTube from early on.

The most and the most important user operations that were configured by the interface had a history in the distribution, exhibition, and viewership of audiovisual contents in other media (p. 36). The interface configured watching as the default mode of engaging with videos. A video started playing as soon as a video page was loaded. User operations like rating, sharing, commenting, and posting a video response were configured as viewer (and not as 'participant') operations and were always only optional.

The initial indifference of the interface with regards to a user's background and preferred way of using the platform need not be enlisted in support of the above argument. Instead, YouTube's interface and database backend can be seen as a system which a user did not have to enter as one kind of agent or the other but which assumed that a user would turn out to be one or the other in the course of time: as a contributor of videos or as a viewer of videos. Tracking, quantifying, and

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representing the actual use of the various possible operations were central in this regard.

The wide discrepancy between views, comments, and 'official' and 'unofficial' video responses the videos from the corpus experienced suggests that the vast majority of people who watched a YouTube video in 2005 and 2006 were happy being and remaining 'mere' viewers, irrespective of the current success level of the YouTube user whose video they were watching, and in spite of explicit calls for response in several videos. The failure of Robinett's *Who are you* of turning viewers into videomakers and uploaders is telling in this regard. Watching was the prime kind of engagement videos experienced even in the early days of the platform. This is in line with more cautious research which notes that less than one percent of visitors (Buckingham, "A Commonplace Art?" 44) or registered users (Lovink, "The Art of Watching Databases" 11; Müller, "Formatted Spaces of Participation" 57) of the platform upload videos.

Because the interface did not determine user activity but evolved in interdependence with such activity, it is safest to say that the interface and its use did not differ but concurred in this regard. Like in the 'old' media film and television, watching was the prime kind of engaging with audiovisual artifacts in the 'new' medium YouTube.

Moreover, a lot of the comments and video responses that videos attracted had the character of responses of a viewer to an audiovisual artifact or to its creator, or from a fan to a star. Consider a comment attracted by a LONELYGIRL15 video after the true nature of the project had been discovered: "So, congrats on another interesting film Lonely-girl15, be it real or not" (KYRANI; see also comments by LOSTFEESHES and MAJITA91 above). Most of the video responses attracted by SMOSH's *Dolls* video were reenactments from users significantly younger than Hecox and Padilla and are best described as fan works (e.g. GOLDALOCKS, *Smosh Short 1: Dolls*). Comments and video responses thus need not be regarded as "inter-creative participation" (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54); a lot of them are best described as viewer or fan response.

In terms of their engagement with videos, the vast majority of visitors and registered YouTube users were viewers and remained viewers. In economic terms, they were consumers because they did not improve on the artifacts or distribute them further. Accordingly, from different perspectives, both viewership and consumption are apt terms of making sense this side of using YouTube.

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Of course this does not imply that 'mere' viewers were passive receptacles: Like watching a film or television program, watching a YouTube video is a complex process during which viewers are active (see e.g. Fiske 359). Nor should consumers necessarily be thought of as gullible and uncritical. Indeed, like consumers in other areas, they occasionally gave feedback about the 'product' they had consumed.

Successful contributors of YouTube videos also watched YouTube videos. Some of them created and uploaded videos that referred to other contributors or their videos. Many of such references appear to be part of a tactic of 'tapping' the viewer bases of more successful users or videos at the beginning of a YouTube career. Because of the searchable database infrastructure of the platform, it was very easy to make a reference readable and to find such referring videos. But that does not mean that such highly intertextual videos were more common on YouTube than in popular culture in general. Only about 16% of the videos from the core corpus dedicatedly referred to another user or video.

Watching movies is part of making movies. The filmmakers of the French New Wave are probably the most famous examples of filmmakers who avidly and dedicatedly watched films made by others, of what they called the *auteurs* of French and classical Hollywood cinema in particular. People who work in television know that watching a lot of television is part of the job. Obviously, creators in both industries are also commenting, for example as critics, members of festival juries, and as teachers. And of course the history of film and television is full of examples of works that 'responded' to others. However, should this prompt us to situate Jean-Luc Godard and Oprah Winfrey not on the side of producing and showing but regard them as 'participants' or 'producers' holding the same status as regular viewers of *À bout de souffle* and *Oprah*?

Contrary to Patricia Lange who argues that YouTube users' "roles as viewers and creators are constantly in flux" (98), the research of this chapter showed that prolific and successful contributors of videos did not stick out as equally prolific commenters or video respondents. It appears that on YouTube a small number of producer/distributor/exhibitors, and an even smaller number of successful ones, emerged.

YouTube fundamentally facilitated the distribution and exhibition of audiovisual artifacts to a viewership that potentially included all Internet users (Buckingham, "Power to the People?" 232; Müller, "Formatted Spaces of Participation" 56). It vested agencies of distribution and exhibition to producers. However, unlike optimists like Michael

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Strangelove suggest, this did not lead into an “age of mass digital cultural production” (185). YouTube did not rid us of the separation of production and consumption which is endemic of modern mass culture, neither in the way the interface was configured nor how it was used. All optimism in this regard (Burgess and Green 54-57; Lange 98; Manovich 42; Strangelove 185) was premature.

Is there reason to complain?

On the one hand, there is reason to complain, because we have been fooled again to believe that a revolution of media technology created in the context of capitalism itself can overcome the power of corporate media and the exclusion of the masses from voice and representation (e.g. Jenkins, “Cultural Theory of YouTube” 96; Strangelove 15, 185). Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas (1–3) and Mirko Tobias Schäfer (21–22) have analyzed these cycles of corporate-sponsored hope and disappointment aptly.

On the other hand, there is no reason to complain. Making, showing, and watching audiovisual contents stood in for corporate media power in liberal wishful thinking and became a target, but that hardly makes it bad. I still think that media for showing and watching audiovisual contents with their realities of a customary separation between production, distribution, and exhibition on the one side and viewership or spectatorship on the other (which exists in most mainstream and indie, commercial and non-commercial cinemas, in television, and on YouTube) are great.

Why should everybody be a creator of artifacts for public presentation? Is being such a creator everybody’s vocation? Most of the people who actually created and uploaded a video to YouTube found that it wasn’t theirs and never uploaded a video again (Landry and Guzdial 7-8). If everybody was a creator, who would be watching and listening? A second important reason for people to stop uploading videos was a lack of viewers (Juhasz, “Tour #3: Popularity”).

There is no reason to demand or applaud that “private” so-called “vernacular creativity” becomes a “legitimate part” of a national or global “cultural public sphere” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 26). Private and small-scale public presentations are legitimate as such. I definitely want to go on strumming cheesy ‘50s tunes on Valentine’s for my girlfriend only. Besides our cherished dream that our friend’s band will make it big, there can be comfort in knowing that if they won’t, they will

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remain our local heroes playing in the neighborhood bar (see also p. 199).

A second set of questions relates to viewership or 'consumption': Is it dubious on principle to merely watch a movie, television program, or YouTube video? Does our enjoyment of discussing audiovisual contents imply that we want to take the creators' place? I suggest that being spectators or viewers is constitutive of our enjoyment of discussing audiovisual contents. We would be talking differently about movies, television programs, and YouTube videos if we had to make them, for sure.

How much more participatory than 'old' media cultures was early YouTube culture really?

Because platform and user practices can be seen in the tradition of other media of producing, showing, and watching audiovisual contents, because there turned out to be users who produced and showed videos and registered or visiting viewers, a comparison of viewer participation on YouTube and in film and on television in terms of quality and extent might be interesting. In this context, viewer participation does not refer to the arguable capacity or reality of YouTube turning viewers into producers, participants, or produsers. It refers to participation in situations in which YouTube contributors and viewers encountered each other on YouTube itself. As Burgess and Green argue, successful video bloggers' videos "explicitly invite [...] inter-creative participation" which distinguishes them from "traditional media content" on television and in YouTube ventures of television players (*YouTube* 54; also "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 105).

I suggest that the scarcity of video objects, the configuration of forms of response as video performance parameters, and sustaining viewers are ideas to make sense of viewer participation in early YouTube culture. By soliciting response in various contests, Pedro Morbeck made viewers of his videos generate footage for future MORBECK videos. Comments and video responses were indices of performance and success on the 'Most Discussed' and 'Most Responded' rankings; and vloggers aimed for success by creating videos that begged for comments and by envisioning video projects in which the generation of comments and video responses was constitutive. Shout-outs of the names of 'fans' and selectively referring to comments and video responses in videos were means of keeping good relations with viewers,

of sustaining the viewer base. Asking for feedback and future topics can be seen as a form of audience evaluation and thus also as a means of sustaining viewers.

Eggo Müller conceptualizes “interactive television programs” like *Aktenzeichen XY ... ungelöst* and *Big Brother* as “formatted spaces of participation” (59). What characterizes all forms of viewer participation on YouTube and links them to those of ‘old’ media, is that participation was formatted according to rules set out by the people who enabled it, and that even in those cases in which others provided ‘content’ instead of mere ‘response,’ this did not fundamentally increase their agency: The people who ran contests or solicited topics for future videos remained in control. The overall extent of “reciprocal activity,” i.e. of contributors responding to viewer responses, which is central in Burgess and Green’s argument (105; also Manovich 42), was small. The ‘Channels’ on YouTube really have a lot in common with those on television, both in terms of how they were configured by the interface and how they were put to use (see Müller 57). YouTube culture was not significantly more participatory than the cultures of ‘old’ media.

Not a social medium in particular

In interplay with other chapters, this chapter also laid challenge to the conceptualization of YouTube as a social medium: to framing YouTube videos, comments, and video responses as communication between people, means of social networking, and to the idea of YouTube users as a community (see p. 17).

Communication

It has been shown that ‘true’ user operations of communication and social networking between people, such as sending messages and adding other users as friends, were not dominant on YouTube’s interface. Moreover, there is no reason to generally understand user operations like posting a comment, and posting a video response, ‘sharing,’ ‘blogging,’ and ‘embedding’ a video in terms of communication between people. Posting a comment and posting a video response were configured as operations for viewers of a video. Essentially, users were responding not to a person but to a YouTube video when using these operations. These functions are genealogically related with various forms of comment and response in publishing. “Share,” “Blog,”

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and “Embed” (Fig. 1.2.2) were operations configured for viewers to further the distribution and exhibition of videos (see p. 32).

Videos that refer to other users or their videos have generally been regarded as communication between users (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 59; “Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 105; Manovich 42). However, in videos in which audiovisual material from other videos was quoted there was not necessarily a communicative act involved. Similarly, many video reviews did without addressing the user who had uploaded the video under review. In other videos users were talked about rather than talked to. Many comments posted to videos did not address the user: “Great, more untalented emo kids getting famous. Just what the world needs” (MELFICE101 on SMOSH, *Dolls*). The video responses posted to contests, such as Morbeck’s *Hottest of YouTube 2006 Contest*, were, indeed, entries to contests in the first place and not necessarily acts of communication between the posting and the hosting users. Other video responses were spam: unrelated videos posted to successful videos using the Video Response function “just to get hits” (BLUNTY3000, *Vblog - how to be popular on youtube*).

Some of the communication between users that occurred through or because of YouTube was of a personal nature. However, there was much less in videos, comments, and video responses than the proponents of the argument about YouTube as a social medium suggest (e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54; Lange, “Videos of Affinity” 71). Most of the communication between users was not of a personal nature but happened in terms of making, showing, and watching videos.

Unlike Burgess and Green insinuate, direct address in videos was typically not reminiscent of “interpersonal face-to-face communication” (*YouTube* 54). Most common was the address of an implied YouTube viewership. Viewers were asked to subscribe, donate, or buy merchandise. ‘Fans’ and ‘haters’ were two groups of viewers that were specifically addressed. Addressing viewers as ‘subscribers’ was even more common.

When the users of the corpus addressed individual others there was a lot of sensitivity with regards to the standing in the emerging social formation of YouTube: Was a user primarily a contributor of videos or a viewer? If he/she was the former, what was her/his position in the rankings? Individual viewers were occasionally addressed in order to signal responsiveness and to sustain the overall viewer base. Contributors on a lower success level were rarely addressed, those on a similar level occasionally, but mostly those on a higher level, commonly in order to tap their viewer bases. Far from creating videos

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largely to communicate with each other, video bloggers communicated to promote their videos.

When users who posted comments or video responses addressed the user who had contributed a video, this also typically happened in terms of making, showing, and watching videos. They commented and responded as viewers, fans, or haters. Successful videomakers were addressed as such and asked for advice, for example to create better videos or how to become “famous” on YouTube (qtd. *How to make better videos* and *BowieChick on BowieChick*).

Associations

Most YouTube use did not establish or maintain associations between people. Watching videos, for example, was the most common way of using the platform (see Buckingham, “A Commonplace Art?” 44), and it typically did not establish an association between people but between a viewer and an audiovisual artifact.

Personal associations were formed and sustained on and through YouTube. However, most associations were not of a personal nature but framed by producing, showing, and watching audiovisual artifacts. Many of these associations had the character of those between fans on the one side and artists (in a wide sense) or stars on the other. Unlike others have argued (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54; Manovich 42), YouTube culture was in strong continuity with the cultures of ‘old’ media in this regard.

The social formation that emerged on YouTube

YouTube users occasionally referred to a community of users or to YouTube as a community. Nevertheless, it appears that the social formation that arose on YouTube was not a community, not even in the early years of the platform during which the community character is said to have been particularly pronounced (e.g. van Dijck 115). YouTube users were neither a community of interest (Henri and Pudenko 478) nor a community of practice (Wenger 6) because their interests and practice of using the platform diverged. In particular, there turned out to be users whose prime interest and practice was creating and showing videos and users whose prime interest and practice was

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watching videos.¹¹⁵ It would be the work of empirical and critical research in the social sciences to provide a better term for the social formation of YouTube, but community certainly is not the right term.

Looking at contributing users on their own, it appears that the system of evaluations and rankings profoundly influenced the social structure of that side of using YouTube. The analysis of users' references to other users and their videos, of collaborations between different users, and of reciprocal activity in comments and video responses suggests that a profoundly hierarchical social structure emerged.

If neither all users of the platform nor all contributors of videos constituted a community, did at least successful video bloggers constitute a community? If we take comments and video responses posted to videos of other vloggers from the corpus and reciprocal activity in such comments and videos as indices of social cohesion (see also Burgess and Green, "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 105), it occurs that not even a community of successful vloggers emerged. Communication among successful vloggers of 2005 and 2006 in videos and comments was sporadic and brief. Associations appear to have been weak and rarely involved more than two users.

It is possible that communities on a smaller scale coalesced around particular uses of the platform, such as the creation of "YouTube Poop" videos (Eugster 49). Nevertheless, among the users of the corpus no such communities could be found. Nor did individual users appear to be 'keys' to such communities. It could be imagined, for example, that Morbeck associated with other users for whom comedic performances of characters from the opposite sex were a field of creativity. It could

¹¹⁵ In February 2007 Hecox and Padilla uploaded a video that documented their visit to a YouTube gathering in San Francisco, a video which can be used to illustrate the incongruence of the idea of a community of users and the reality of the social formation that emerged on YouTube. In *A Day in the Life of Smosh: YouTube SF Gathering* differences between Hecox and Padilla's interaction with other at the time successful contributing users and with viewers are conspicuous. SMOSH approach other successful contributors as colleagues and exchange circumspect compliments on each other's videos. Viewers approach them as YouTube stars and ask for autographs. At the end of the video they give a list of the other successful contributors they have met – RENETTO, BOH3M3, THEHILL88, SMPFILMS, and the makers of LONELYGIRL15 – without mentioning viewers/fans collectively or individually. Ironically, the motto of the YouTube gathering had been "As One" (Sandoval, "Top YouTube Videographers Descend on S.F.").

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also be expected that Nate Burr appeared to be a member of a community of stop-motion animators on YouTube. But neither of them did.

Offline and local communication and collaboration

This study did not find evidence about a particularly social and collaborative character of YouTube online culture. However, communication and collaboration in existing or emerging local and offline configurations was prominent. SMOSH was run by two friends. Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) frequently collaborated with her sister. Paul Robinett (RENETTO) had his neighbor over to support him. Such offline interaction and networking typically did not feature in arguments about YouTube as a social and collaborative phenomenon (Burgess and Green 64-65; Strangelove 186-187). Paradoxically, however, a social and collaborative character of YouTube culture in 2005 and 2006 can mainly be found off-YouTube.

In order to work, all media depend on communication and associations between people. All media are also catalysts of communication and associations between people. Indeed, all media are social (Clay 232). The term social medium is thus tautological. Apart from that, looking at interface and uses of YouTube in 2005 and 2006, YouTube does not seem to need the emphatic label 'social.'

Conclusion

This study offered an exploration of early YouTube culture. In this conclusion I want to sum up the most important results.

Setup

At the beginning of my engagement with YouTube was the realization that – while it was obvious that videos were created and uploaded to YouTube – videos were rarely regarded and studied as audiovisual artifacts: as objects that were created by use of audiovisual techniques to be seen by others. The conspicuous efforts of individual users in video production appeared to be at odds with the prominent readings of users as participants on a continuum of cultural participation and of videos as mere means of communication and social networking, arguments that were particularly applied to the early years of the platform’s use. The appearance of unacknowledged fictional user characters between April and June 2006 indicated that some process of conventionalization had been underway on regular YouTube channels for some time because otherwise it would not have been possible to emulate a regular user’s videos and channel. More generally, a dedicated and fresh engagement with the early years of the platform a couple of years after the peak of research interest in YouTube seemed promising to revisit the arguments made thus far. For these reasons, I set out to approach YouTube culture during the years 2005 and 2006 with the aim of analyzing and understanding videos as audiovisual artifacts.

Based on the assumption that successful users enjoyed a heightened visibility on the platform and served as role models for other users, I took the ‘Most Subscribed’ of ‘All Time’ ranking as a starting point for corpus formation. I conducted an exploratory analysis of the 33 user channels that appeared on the ranking archived on three dates during the time of interest and that still held videos from that time. The result was that the vast majority of channels shared a few basic traits. I decided to deal with these 28 user channels for the further stages of the project.

In rough analogy with the wide use of the term by YouTube users and by researchers like Patricia Lange (“(Mis)conceptions” 87), I referred to channels with these traits as video blogs, further differentiating between regular video blogs and unacknowledged fictional video

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blogs. “[V]log entries” had been the most common kind of “user-created” videos in Burgess and Green’s study of popular YouTube videos in late 2007. “Vlogging” was acknowledged as “an emblematic form of YouTube participation” during the early years of the platform (53).

Throughout this study, I argued that video blogging could be regarded as a cultural and, more specifically, as an audiovisual practice: a practice in which audiovisual artifacts were created and shown. I suggested that, depending on other cultural and audiovisual practices, the practice video blogging, which was constituted by certain conventions, emerged on YouTube in 2005 and 2006. Users’ creative decisions were at once giving shape to and being shaped by this practice. I also argued that ‘the video blog’ emerged as a cultural and, more specifically, as an audiovisual form: a body of interdependent traits of audiovisual artifacts.

Based on a close analysis of the audiovisual and other material, I developed terms and distinctions to describe and understand videos and channels. Apart from that, I also borrowed and adapted terminology from the study of diverse practices and forms.

YouTube

Even though uses of YouTube and not the hosting service itself were the object of this study, several findings concerned YouTube, the online service provided by YouTube Inc.

Ultimately, YouTube was a service for the distribution, exhibition and viewership of videos from early on. Videos – and not user profiles – were the principal entities hosted and offered by the service. The most important user operations with regards to videos and other users had a history in the distribution, exhibition, and viewership of audiovisual contents in other media. The principal user positions that the interface invited users to occupy were those of a distributor/exhibitor of videos and of a viewer of videos. The default mode of engaging with a video was to watch it. Further modes of engagement, such as writing a comment, posting a video response, and sharing a video in an Email or by posting it on another website, were also configured as viewer operations and merely optional.

YouTube also offered social media functionality, such as sending other users private messages or adding them as ‘friends,’ or founding and joining ‘groups.’ Such functionality was at no time predominant on the interface, and it receded throughout 2006 before the takeover of

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YouTube by Google. The analysis of the early YouTube interface thus challenged the argument about a transformation of a site for social networking and group activities to a site for watching videos in the follow-up of the takeover (van Dijck 114).

YouTube was free to use and looked the same to all Internet users, irrespective of their background or preferred form of using the service. Registered users could use the same account to perform various operations. However, all use of the platform was tracked and quantified. Accordingly, YouTube's interface and database backend can be seen as a system that a user did not have to enter as a contributor or viewer of videos but that assumed that a user would certainly turn out to be one or the other over time. Rankings in terms of various parameters were tools of representing users who had turned out to be successful contributors of videos as such.

Because of prominent disputes over the upload of third-party content by some users, YouTube was initially discussed in relation to file sharing services (e.g. *Newsweek*). Nevertheless, uploads that infringed copyright were deemed illicit in the Terms of Use from the time YouTube went online. The company also declared to remove videos that infringed on the copyright of third parties if notified by these parties (see "Terms of Use," Internet Archive, 28 April 2005). It has complied with such notices at least since February 2006 (see e.g. Broache). Apart from negative measures, the company has also supported the production and upload of original videos from early on, for example by sponsoring contests for user-created videos since August 2005 (see Fig. 1.2.1), through the introduction of the Director status for contributors of original videos in April 2006, and through 'sharing' ad revenues with successful 'home-grown' producers of videos from spring 2007 on. The contributors of YouTube videos were thus understood to also be the producers of these videos (or their entitled representatives) – and not illegal uploaders of third-party content.

In the history of other media and media industries in which audiovisual artifacts were produced, distributed, exhibited, and watched, YouTube did not challenge the separation between producing and showing on the one side and watching on the other. On the contrary, the company fundamentally relied on this separation in designing the service. However, YouTube (and similar video hosting services started in 2005 and 2006) enabled producers to become their own distributors and exhibitors. YouTube fundamentally lowered the barriers of showing audiovisual artifacts to viewers, to a viewership that potentially included all Internet users at that. Even if we concede that the agency of

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distribution and exhibition had to be shared with YouTube Inc., this was a significant event in the history of creating and showing audiovisual artifacts.

Users and videos were not positioned in an egalitarian environment but in a system of top-down promotion through the company and bottom-up evaluations and rankings through viewers. The proverbial 15 minutes of fame and individual viral success have received a lot of news media attention. However, more fundamental in the operationalization of user agency of distribution and exhibition, was the subscription system. It allowed video contributors to build and sustain viewer bases.

Using YouTube

How was YouTube used in the early years of the service, that is, when it was relatively new?

The most subscribed regular and unacknowledged fictional video blogs of 2005 and 2006 were the object of this study. The analysis of the 'life' of the videos from the corpus once uploaded to the platform – i.e. of the activities of uploaders and others with regards to videos – suggested that the involved users and visitors used the platform largely in terms of showing or watching videos (chapter 7). It appears that on YouTube a small number of producers and uploaders of videos (and an even smaller number of successful ones) emerged. It also appears that a large number of viewers emerged – including a few who also responded to, rated, or shared videos, or occasionally uploaded a video themselves – but most of which merely watched. Contrary to the notions of a “continuum of cultural participation” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 57) and of users' roles being constantly “in flux” (Lange, “(Mis)conceptions” 98), YouTube users typically either fell into one camp or the other.¹¹⁶ In the research thus far, such a differentiation was attributed only to an ‘advanced’ state of YouTube culture, to the time from 2007 on, when the Partner Program was introduced and “media corporations” were said to have appeared on the platform (van Dijck 115-116).

¹¹⁶ It goes without saying that – like the majority of YouTube users – all YouTube visitors also fell into the viewer camp. In order to upload a video, a YouTube account was necessary, and visitors did not have an account (p. 58).

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This impression would have to be corroborated by further research, of user practices other than video blogging and of less successful video bloggers (and users running unacknowledged fiction video blogs) in particular. On the other hand it is important to note that video blogs of both types vastly outnumbered other channels on the 'Most Subscribed' ranking and that their importance within early YouTube culture is consensus (e.g. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 53; Lange, "(Mis)conceptions" 87). It also needs to be called to mind that the arguments about a continuum of participation and a community of users explicitly included successful users (e.g. Burgess and Green, "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 105).

The social media framing of YouTube is characterized by a focus on users (and not on videos) and by a conceptualization of users as communicative participants within a social network or community. I have pointed to flaws of this framing of describing and making sense of YouTube's interface and the use of the service throughout. Communication and associations between users did occur on YouTube, but their extent and quality do not justify the emphatic label social medium. Like other offline and online settings of human activity, YouTube had a social dimension during the time of interest. However, I demonstrated that the social formation that emerged was not a community. The overall social cohesion of YouTube users was low. The social formation was structured by the activities of creating and showing videos on the one side and by more or less responsive watching on the other. Looking at video contributors, a hierarchical order generated and represented through evaluations and rankings was salient.

Users' backgrounds and motivations

The research of the backgrounds and motivations of the users from the corpus for using the service (chapter 2.1) suggested that the agency of showing videos was welcomed by a range of different people from early on.

Among the users from the corpus were people who did not have a background in creating and showing audiovisual or musical works. An important finding was the significant extent of early contribution of people with experience in audiovisual or music production – some of them trained – that were already publicly showing their work in other contexts. Some of them already had a following online or gained recognition at film festivals. People pursuing careers as directors,

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screenwriters, actors/actresses, producers, editors, and musicians were among early successful users. Typically these people were in the early stages of their career, or pursuing highly individual or alternative career paths. These people were not 'ordinary,' but neither did they have more than a marginal standing in the media industries. They were either ignored or wrongly categorized with the polarized perspective on amateurism and industry professionalism that was common in the press (e.g. Heffernan) and in some of the YouTube research (Jenkins, "Cultural Theory of YouTube" 94; Strangelove 14; van Dijck 115). Such people were usually said to have adopted the platform only later (e.g. Burgess and Green, "Entrepreneurial Vlogger" 104). However, maybe YouTube's popular culture was not that 'ordinary' to begin with. It appears that YouTube did not so much signal changes for the relationship between ordinary people and the established media industries but offered chances for those producers who were standing 'in between' or had a complex situatedness anyway; and that this was the case from early on.

For all users from the corpus – with or without a background in related areas – creating and showing videos was or became a dedicated interest, an interest that they spent time, effort, and money on. Many of them identified as videomakers. Looking at users' statements and their use of the platform, communication and social networking were, in most cases, merely secondary or peripheral interests.

Video production

The YouTube interface did not support collaborative video production and distribution by different users of the platform. In this context, it is no surprise that the users from the corpus hardly ever collaborated – contradicting arguments about the collaborative character of YouTube online culture. However, local offline collaboration in existing or emerging constellations, which did not feature in these arguments, was significant in the corpus. SMOSH was run by two friends. Brooke Brodack (BROOKERS) frequently collaborated with her sister. Paul Robinett (RENETTO) had his neighbor over to support him. All of this reminds of small scale film production (Bordwell and Thompson 38-39). Maybe YouTube culture did not constitute a break from the cultures of old media as much as it was in continuity with certain segments of these cultures.

Conclusion

The vloggers of the corpus – i.e. the users running regular video blogs – were pursuing specific video projects when making videos. Their videos were dedicated to single objects which provided them with unity. They had an idea about the video to be made before turning the camera on. Choices about production, content, and form depended on these projects and objects.

Such choices also depended on the scarcity which was an overall condition of YouTube videomaking in 2005 and 2006. Scarcity and responding to scarcity shaped video bloggers' decisions and on the long run the conventions of video blogging. There were several areas of scarcity, the scarcities of video objects (i.e. of 'content'), of personnel, and of money stuck out.

Taking material from the YouTube or overall cultural context – for example in the creation of parodic performance videos, reviews, and music videos – can be seen as a response to the scarcity of objects instead of as an indication of the interactive or even critical nature of YouTube culture.

The scarcity of personnel in front of and behind the camera was fundamental for organizing production. Multitasking, for example by playing a variety of characters in the same video oneself, was one type of response. Activating networks of friends and family was another type of response. Vloggers (and supporting participants) performed and fulfilled production tasks for the same videos. This tactic thus responded to the scarcities of personnel and 'content' in the practice. Also, vloggers wanted to be seen with their friends – and their friends with them. Indeed, if we wanted to locate a social character of early YouTube culture, this would have to be off and not on YouTube.

The overall low level of production values and the ways in which scarcities were reflected on and shown in the videos themselves characterized video blogging. We are witnessing scarcities, reflection, and response in videos like *Butterfly* (BROOKERS) and *Renetto goes TANNING* (RENETTO). One way of making sense of the overall aesthetics of video blogging would be in terms of an aesthetics of scarcity and responding to scarcity.

While the quality level of YouTube videos in areas such as the profilmic presentation, image and sound quality improved over the years to the present, early YouTube culture was not an unspecific realm of 'bad' quality but a realm in which video bloggers developed their own standards of what a 'good' video was. They improved the quality of their videos as much as they considered necessary. Instead of calling

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for ever more improvement towards professional standards, they conventionalized a specific 'low' level of quality.

The minimal standard of the preparation stage (i.e. of the stage before footage was shot) was to decide about a video project and object. From the minimal degree of preparation all sorts of higher levels of preparedness could be found. For the production of some videos, there was an integrated concept for shooting and postproduction before the first footage was even shot.

Motivations, identifications, and use of the service by early successful video bloggers suggest that video blogging, which was typically regarded as a practice of communication and social networking (e.g. Burgess and Green 54; Harley and Fitzpatrick 681), can also be regarded as an audiovisual practice.

Individual vloggers' videomaking inspired others and the emerging practice video blogging at large. At the same time, the emerging conventions of video blogging called for stylistic differentiation within. Vloggers differentiated themselves within the practice through the specific use of the techniques in focus of this study.

The creators of unacknowledged fictional vlogs 'studied' the mode of production of regular vlogs. This mode of production was emulated in the framed situation of production within the framing situation of production hidden from viewers on the channels EMOKID21OHIO, LIT-TLELOCA, LONELYGIRL15, and DANIELBEAST.

Kinds of videos

Public diary clips, subject clips, parodic performance videos, self/world documentaries, sketch comedy videos, lip sync and home dance music videos, and musical performance videos were common on the video blogs of the corpus. Obviously, each of these kinds bore relations with other cultural formations: Video bloggers appropriated, transformed, or recombined such formations into more or less distinct YouTube formations. The public diary clip, for example, bore traces of weblogs, autobiographical documentaries, and television newscasts – and was at the same time distinctly 'YouTube.' In lip sync and home dance music videos the same regime between music and images that characterizes industry music videos could be found. However, there were fundamental differences in the mise-en-scene: With very few exceptions the vloggers were shown – and not the vocalists and instrumentalists associated with the records. In video blogging there

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was an understanding that pop stars provided the musical recordings and vloggers the images. The images were 'off-limits' for the stars – very much unlike in industry music videos. For each of these kinds and for their coexistence in video blogging the binary of “everyday” and “institutional” creativity (e.g. Strangelove 15) is neither descriptive nor offering interesting insights – much less a singular conceptualization as “everyday” (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 38).

The makeup from different kinds and their relative commonality were specific of the audiovisual form ‘video blog’ in 2005 and 2006. This also involves that some formations that are common elsewhere were uncommon on video blogs, for example documentaries in which the world (and not the world and the vlogger) was the prime interest. An important finding (already during corpus formation) was that the oft-discussed mashup videos of works created within the established media industries were not at all common on YouTube’s most subscribed channels at the time.

Typically, vloggers created videos of different kinds and specialized in one or two. Kinds of videos thus offered vloggers the opportunity to differentiate themselves within the practice. Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) was known for subject clips of the ‘rant’ variety, Pedro Morbeck for parodic performance videos, Hecox and Padilla (SMOSH) for sketch comedy, and Matthew Lush (GAYGOD) for home dance videos.

The creators of LONELYGIRL15 (and of other unacknowledged fictional vlogs) recognized that the audiovisual form they were buying into comprised different kinds of videos. Thus they did not only create public diary clips but also subject clips, self/world documentaries, and a music video.

Settings

The bedroom held a special status among all other settings of video blogging in 2005 and 2006. It was particularly used by vloggers who were still living with their parents, such as those of SMOSH and BOWIECHICK. It was also recognized as a typical setting by the creators of unacknowledged fictional vlogs, in the press, and in research.

The bedroom setting was in part the result of scarcity. In contrast with the notion of “private spaces” that were “simply” shown “as they are” (Peters and Seier 192), the analysis indicated that the bedroom was willingly, consciously, and performatively put into the scene on video blogs. Besides its function as a setting (i.e. as something that

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was put in front of a camera and shown in a video) the bedroom also functioned as a site of production: as a studio and as an editing room. Teenage and young adult vloggers postproduced their videos on their computers in their bedrooms, even if the footage was shot in other locations.

The settings of videos on vlogs can be described in terms of an expansive outward movement from bedrooms to other settings in the home, to local and regional settings, to Los Angeles, the center of the American entertainment industry. Los Angeles became a setting because individual successful vloggers went to LA for talks with established companies or even struck deals, and because people from the margins of the industry – who were located in LA – started YouTube projects from early summer 2006 on.

Interestingly, however, there were also vloggers who seem to only have ‘discovered’ the domestic setting after producing videos for a while. Joining YouTube in December 2005 and having used various public outdoors and indoors settings, Tony Huynh (THEWINEKONE) started to use his bedroom as a setting only in late March 2006. Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000) joined YouTube in March 2006 to showcase his Lego stop-motion animation videos which had constructed settings. Only in June 2006 he started to shoot subject clips and other videos with his apartment as a setting. Thus setting is an aspect that allows us to gain insights about the evolution and conventionalization of the audiovisual form ‘video blog’ in general. Inspired by pioneer vloggers who were shooting videos in a domestic setting, many people joined YouTube in spring and early summer 2006 and released videos with a domestic setting. Nevertheless, early video bloggers who did not initially use a domestic setting also discovered this option. Thus spring and early summer 2006 can be considered as a period of growth and conventionalization of video blogging. At the same time it became clear that such conventions also called for variation and novelty which can be seen in redecoration videos released in July and in the expansive outward movement to other settings beyond the bedroom and the home.

Bodies and performance

I suggested that a distinction between corporeal and audiovisual delivery was useful to account for the interdependent importances of the body and audiovisual techniques in video blogging and to situate individual videos on a continuum between these poles.

In the YouTube research thus far, the body was typically seen as a tool of enactment. Self-enactments from emphatic to playful and the unacknowledged fictional performances on LONELYGIRL15 were main interests. In order to provide a more comprehensive conceptualization, I took a step back from different kinds of enactments and suggested that the body was fulfilling four functions to varying degrees at the same time in video blogging: action, enactment, the creation of audiovisual variety, and its own exploration. On unacknowledged fictional vlogs this functioning of the body was emulated.

Like the other functions, action involved speech and the 'rest' of the body. The moving and speaking body was constitutive for the creation of audiovisual variety. This function has not been accounted for in the research thus far, but interestingly, the makers of LONELYGIRL15 stumbled over this function in their engagement with regular vlogs. Audiovisual material has to 'move' and 'make sounds,' and vloggers used their bodies to make sure it was. The visible and audible body was also giving witness of its own life in video blogging: not only through spoken testimony, also by its very being alive in front of the camera. Teenage and young adult vloggers explored their unruly bodies in front of the camera – and could decide whether to turn the footage into a public audiovisual artifact or not.

Vloggers' bodies were productive and versatile tools for the creation of audiovisual artifacts: Vloggers spoke, danced, sang, played instruments, lip synced, gestured, jumped and moved about, enacted selves and others and executed production tasks on camera. Performances came about as the distinct interactions of the vlogger's body in a setting with occasional co-performers, a video object, the camera, implied viewers, and further entities.

Enactment was under scrutiny in chapters 4.1 and 4.2. An overall result was that regular video blogs – which were typically seen as the realm of self performances – sported a complex and rich interplay of modes of performance. Typically, self performances and performances of an other could be found on the same channel or even in the same video.

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Performances of an other were typically acknowledged as such by vloggers in the videos themselves or in paratexts. *The Cat fight* (MORBECK) and *Paste !!!!!* (BROOKERS), for example, communicated differences between the characters that were presented and the performers on multiple levels.

Video bloggers employed modes of performance in reflected and purposeful ways with regards to the video projects they were pursuing. On regular videos blogs we do not encounter an “authentic pluralism” of ‘equal’ selves (Strangelove 76) but performances of selves and others of different statuses that were fulfilling specific functions in each instance.

The use of audiovisual techniques

In the exploration of the use of audiovisual techniques, the focus was on cinematography and editing.

Cinematography

The cinematography of scarcity was an efficient manner of transforming profilmic space into images on regular video blogs, a cinematography which responded to the scarcity of personnel. Static and mobile framings and camera distance depended on the number of participants involved in the production of a video. There were different variants of the cinematography of scarcity; the one- and two-participant variants were most common. Significantly, shots in which all participants of a video were onscreen, were either static, or mobile with the camera operated from onscreen. Some single vloggers asked friends and family members to participate and thus expanded their cinematographic options, for example to create mobile shots of themselves without the need to operate the camera from onscreen.

On regular video blogs static shots were more common than mobile shots because they allowed participants to concentrate on their profilmic presentation. Also, only a static camera enabled single vloggers to produce videos with figures that were unaware of the camera. An indication of their overall efficiency and concern about the quality of the image, video bloggers only handheld the camera when necessary, for example when their profilmic activities were meant to be expansive, to show several distinct parts of a larger setting, and/or when there was no tripod or flat surface to put the camera to rest. Single vloggers in

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particular moved their bodies to compensate for the immobility of the frame in static shots; coming closer to the camera or moving away was a common tactic of varying camera distance.

Because unacknowledged fictional vlogs were meant to pass as regular video blogs, the cinematography of authentication largely relied on the mentioned conventions of the cinematography of scarcity. However, some shots that would have been static on regular vlogs were handheld on LONELYGIRL15 and other unacknowledged fictional vlogs because handholding was stereotypically associated with an 'amateur' mode of production and added an air of 'authenticity' to the image. Handholding the camera was not a characteristic of regular video blogs but of unacknowledged fictional vlogs.

Editing

I suggested that there were four main modes of editing in video blogging: one-shot clip editing, jump cut editing, sequence editing, and illustration editing.

Creating a music video as a one-shot clip was a simple way of producing such a video: Activities inspired by the music, such as lip syncing and dancing, were recorded while the chosen pop record was playing in the background on a CD player or computer. The relationship between image and sound track created during the shooting stage was preserved in postproduction; that is, no cuts were made. Several non-musical videos on vlogs were also one-shot clips. Vloggers who did not have experience in audiovisual production tended to produce one-shot clips or clips with few cuts at the beginning of their YouTube activities and increasingly used editing later. This development was in analogy with the first decades of cinema. Editing appears to have been a technique whose potential these vloggers did not immediately recognize, a technique they had to discover as powerful, and which they began employing in terms of specific video projects and emerging individual stylistic preferences.

There were numerous videos – public diary and subject clips in particular – that had a large number of jump cuts. Vloggers eliminated footage they considered superfluous from continuous takes. They also noticed that the resulting jump cuts entailed a gain in visual variety. Because such editing was primarily applied to static footage of single vloggers speaking, it could hardly disorient viewers. YouTube jump cut editing was an editing mode that negotiated an economic, coherent,

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and continuous flow of audiovisual information with the creation of visual variety. While jump cuts were certainly not an invention of video bloggers, the use of jump cuts to edit footage of monologic presentations in front of a static camera was specific to the audiovisual practice. It seems that by June 2006 jump cut editing was recognized as a distinct editing mode among YouTube users. New and established vloggers noticed it on other channels and used it as well. Recognition and reflection of routines as such and normative statements attest to the emergence of conventions. It appears that in the case of YouTube jump cut editing, the routine and style of one or a few individuals lead to a convention of the audiovisual practice video blogging at large.

Sequence editing encompassed simple to complex editing that created sequences of discrete and non-arbitrarily related shots. Shots were discrete with regards to what they showed and/or framing. Several videos indicated that users borrowed devices – such as establishing shots, the 180° system, and shot/reverse-shot patterning – from continuity editing. This was particularly the case on SMOSH and on LONELYGIRL15 after the project was found out.

Illustration editing was involved in a second, a more labor-intensive way of producing music videos. Diverse footage was shot and assembled to support a pop record which provided the sound track for the eventual music video in postproduction. In such videos, graphical, rhythmical, spatial, and temporal relationships between shots were primarily felt by dint of their relationship to the musical recording on the sound track. Illustration editing was very similar to music video editing in general while complexity was lower.

The coexistence of these editing modes in video blogging in 2005 and 2006 was distinct. However, the most important insight from the study of editing was that vloggers strategically employed editing on the level of modes and on a smaller level to support specific video projects they were working on and to achieve specific results. Paul Robinett, for example, produced *This Is YouTube at its best!* as a one-shot clip and *Renetto goes TANNING* using jump cut and sequence editing; and each choice appears to have been the best for the respective video.

Form

The most basic and fundamental insight of chapter 6 was that form mattered in video blogging. In spite of the absence of limitations from YouTube in this regard, vloggers uploaded videos with a distinct

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overall form that was created in support of the video projects they were pursuing. It was impossible to find videos that were altogether incoherent or without form on a small or large-scale level: All videos displayed symptoms of people giving form to the material they decided to upload. Vloggers gave form to their videos through choices about profilmic space and events, cinematography, editing, titles, and other techniques.

Typically, videos were dedicated to single objects. In most cases, videos were discrete audiovisual artifacts and not part of larger 'wholes' in terms of content or form. Choosing single topics in subject clips allowed vloggers who did not spend a lot of time on preparation to remain focused during their profilmic presentation and gave them something 'to return to' if they should digress. All videos uploaded to YouTube had to be given titles. Titles were usually indicative of videos' objects. On the long run, dealing with single objects made vloggers create a variety of videos because they were unlikely to produce a video with the same object again. With regards to reception, single objects allowed viewers to know what a video was 'about' and to follow it through from beginning to end.

Beginning, middle, and end was the lowest common denominator of large-scale video structure. Like audiovisual artifacts created in other practices (Bordwell and Thompson 63-65), videos on early successful video blogs did not only have a first and last frame but were made to begin and end by their creators. Below this level, there was a lot of variation depending on the video project.

The choice of single objects for videos and the beginning, middle, and end structure situate videos on vlogs in the context of various cultural formations. The question of 'everyday' or 'industry' creativity recedes with regards to these very general features. After all Aristotle had already claimed that in all "arts of representation" a "single object" should be represented (section 1451a).

Commonly, inserts were part of the large-scale structure of beginning, middle, and end: elements that notably 'stuck out' from the rest of the video. While some inserts resulted from digressions during the profilmic presentation, normally only those inserts ended up in videos for YouTube upload that were fulfilling a function with regards to the other elements of the video, the video at large, or the overall YouTube context. The main functions of inserts were to provide an example, illustration, or evidence; to add narrative complexity; a meta-level; and to refer to other users. Inserts were a typical trait of the large-scale structure of videos on vlogs.

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The dedication of videos to single objects and the beginning, middle, and end structure attests to a high degree of closure of videos on vlogs. Audiovisual material could be worked on as long as it was offline – and not anymore if it had been uploaded to YouTube. A vlogger's upload of a video implied that the video was finished and ready to be shown to others. In this sense, every one of their uploaded videos was a finished audiovisual artifact.

During the exploratory analysis for corpus formation I found that the videos uploaded to the vast majority of the most subscribed channels of 2005 and 2006 shared a number of traits. The most important of these traits was the appearance of the user (or of a fictional user character), who claimed to be producing the videos in the videos themselves. Accordingly, it is no surprise that the appearance and reappearance of the user (or fictional user character) in the videos was the prime element that linked the videos released on a channel. Viewers subscribed to a user's (or fictional user character's) channel and could depend on her or his visibility and audibility in the audiovisual material of future videos.

Showing the videos

The users from the corpus – vloggers and users running unacknowledged fictional vlogs – used YouTube to show videos they had created or were about to create. With few exceptions, they cared about numbers and dedication of viewers and about their success within the competitive setting configured by the interface. Creatively, they aimed for success in this setting. They produced videos that were innovative and well-made within the context of early YouTube culture. They referred to more successful contributors and their videos not so much in order to start a communicative exchange but to tap their viewer bases, a tactic that some of them also reflected on in their videos. Numbers of comments and video responses were configured as parameters of a successful performance of videos on YouTube. Accordingly, some users devised video projects in which the generation of response was a constitutive element, for example by asking a question or starting a contest to which others could submit video responses. Sharing and cloning of videos by the contributing users themselves – arguably more than by viewers of their videos – generated views on YouTube and beyond and 'viral' success. Contributing users aimed to sustain their viewer bases through the ongoing production of videos, celebrat-

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ing landmark numbers of subscribers and saying ‘thank you,’ and through selective emphatic references to comments, video responses, or messages in their videos.

The vast majority of users from the corpus created or took opportunities to financially benefit from their YouTube activities – at times contrary to their own declarations. In contrast with the notion of non-commercial videomaking that was commercialized or supplanted by commercial players in the follow-up of Google’s acquisition of YouTube and the introduction of advertising revenue sharing in 2007 (van Dijck 12, 126-127), I demonstrated that commerce was important already in early YouTube culture.

Typically, the users of the corpus did not reciprocate comments or video responses, not even in the time before they became successful. This contradicted the arguments about users’ situatedness on a “continuum of cultural participation” and within a community of users, which was said to also include “YouTube stars;” arguments in which “reciprocal activity” was an important element. The most and the best interaction happened between fictional user characters created by the same producers. The ideal of reciprocal creative and communicative activity on YouTube was reality mostly in fiction.

Final overarching points

Audiovisual artifacts

Video bloggers’ videos may not strike us as deep or subtle. They may not be unrecognized masterpieces of audiovisual art. However, they are not mere chunks of audiovisual data in a database with other sorts of data (Lovink, “The Art of Watching Databases” 9-10), documents of communication between people (Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 54), or the more or less specific results of showing off the features of postproduction software either (52): They are audiovisual artifacts. These artifacts were the result of the calculated use of the body and audiovisual techniques in the pursuit of specific video projects. They were the outcome of creative and other work. These were overall results of the study of production, the use of the body and audiovisual techniques, and of the overall form of videos.

It was also conspicuous that videos were made to fulfill specific functions with regards to viewers – be it to entertain (*Smosh Short 1: Dolls*), to educate (BLUNTY3000, *Vblog – how to be popular on*

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youtube), to convince viewers of a proposition (*3:00 AM Madness*), or to document an event for viewers to see (*Renetto goes TANNING*).

Except for a few rare cases, videos were made to be shown in public. All of them were shown in public. Domestic settings were selectively shown. They were prepared for and transformed by the presentation. Video bloggers typically addressed a general YouTube viewership – and not a group of friends or a community of users – during their profilmic presentation. Silent and filled pauses, which are legit in everyday conversation, were regarded as mistakes in video blogging and avoided or censored. Most importantly, while YouTube provided functionality to show videos to a private circle of YouTube friends, this was not how the videos of the corpus were shown: They were shown for all YouTube users and visitors of the site to see. Video blogging, I suggest, was a public audiovisual practice – and not semi-private practice or a private practice gone public (cf. Burgess and Green, *YouTube* 13).

Video blogging

A specific agency was constitutive of the audiovisual practice video blogging since video bloggers were performers, producers, and distributor/exhibitors of their videos. Unlike performers on reality television, video bloggers were not people 'being themselves' in front of a camera and shown by others. Video blogging fundamentally differed from reality television in terms of performers' agency. Nor were video bloggers people who documented their lives in order to create footage for ostensibly participatory film projects like *Life in a Day* (dirs. MacDonald et al.): People who had no agency about if their footage, how much of it, and how it would be shown in the eventual film (see Watercutter). Video bloggers performed in front of the camera, shot and postproduced their videos, and decided about and managed distribution and exhibition. The user was a producer, performer, 'piece of' content and origin of content, formal element, and brand element in video blogging.

Were unacknowledged fictional vlogs part of the practice video blogging?

There was an incongruence between the situation of production that was communicated in videos and paratexts, and the real situation of production. Such channels can be conceptualized as constructed

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regular vlogs within an unacknowledged frame. Thus unacknowledged fictional vlogs diverged in terms of the communicative pact between the contributing users and their viewers.

While a personal union of performing, producing, and uploading was constructed on unacknowledged fictional vlogs, such a union did not necessarily also exist in the framing situation of production. The LONELYGIRL15 project in particular stuck out not because of its supposed 'inauthenticity' but because the performer Jessica Rose was not at the same time producing the videos and running the channel. Her agency was that of a regular actress, not of a vlogger. Vloggers performed as themselves and as others in their videos. Performers on unacknowledged fictional vlogs were stuck with the 'authentic' presentation of individual fictional vlogger characters. Accordingly, unacknowledged fictional vlogs were probably not part of video blogging in terms of agency and performance.

However, on a broader cultural level, these channels were part of video blogging. The users running unacknowledged fictional vlogs emulated regular vlogs and at times modified their traits. Influences also worked the other way around: The first appearance of Bree in *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* prompted several YouTube visitors to start regular video blogs – building not so much on other regular vlogs but on unacknowledged fictional vlogs.¹¹⁷ When the trio running LONELYGIRL15 tried to convince established television networks of a crossmedial collaboration, they painfully realized how much they were part of YouTube culture and not of television culture (Davis).

It was striking that as early as spring 2006 – only one year after YouTube went online – YouTube's video culture itself became an important source for the creation of fictional characters and impersonations. Video bloggers had not been content with merely performing as themselves from the beginning, as early videos on BROOKERS suggest. In March 2006 Pedro Morbeck opened his YouTube channel, a channel on which not only performing an other prevailed over performing self, but in which nearly all adapted and original fictional characters and impersonations were video bloggers. Unacknowledged fictional video

¹¹⁷ See e.g. *INTRO*, the first video of the vlogger by the user name JEFFYJACKASS, which shows up as a video response on *First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails* (Internet Archive, 19 July 2006).

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blogs manifested the importance of YouTube's own cultural repertoire as a source of inspiration. Contrary to the claim of the dominance of popular culture in general to the intertextual activities of YouTube videomakers (Jenkins, "Cultural Theory of YouTube" 94; Seier and Peters 201), this suggests that video blogging emerged as a practice with a strong intracultural dynamics – a practice in which most intertextual references went to other works within. A glance at the topics of subject clips confirms the notion of such a predominance (e.g. video reviews and tutorials), whereas music videos for pop records were obviously a segment of video blogging which overall popular culture was important indeed. While the social cohesion of video bloggers (and of YouTube users in general) was small, the cultural cohesion of video blogging was strong.

Ultimately, video blogging on YouTube deserves to be regarded as an audiovisual practice with its own conventions, consistencies of content and form. Depending on other audiovisual forms, the video blog emerged as a recognizable and distinct form on YouTube in 2005 and 2006 within and in interplay with the emerging practice video blogging.

Coda: YouTube and YouTube Culture Today

What were important developments with regards to the interests of this study, that deserve to be mentioned here either because the study of YouTube culture in 2005 and 2006 ‘points’ to them, or because they appear in a certain light taking into account the results of the study?¹¹⁸

Expansion of advertising – and of advertising revenue sharing

I have refuted the narrative about YouTube’s scrapping of community features on the interface, the disintegration of the mythical YouTube community, and about the commercialization of the service and video culture in the follow-up of Google’s purchase of YouTube (van Dijck 12, 114-115, 126-127). Community features like ‘Groups’ were at no point prominent on YouTube, and comments and video responses were neither configured nor predominantly used in terms of communication and social networking. YouTube was a for-profit venture from the onset, and the increasing monetization of videos through advertisement was part of the founders’ initial plan. From early on, successful video contributors – with or without a background in commercial media production – began monetizing videos through their own initiatives and when they were offered opportunities to do so.

Taking into account the founders’ plan to make the platform profitable, the expansion of advertising in recent years should thus be no surprise. YouTube is still free to use. In their account settings, contributing users can decide whether or not they want advertisement to be shown with their videos. There are banner, overlay, and pre-roll ads on video pages. Viewers can click away overlay ads at all times and most pre-roll ads after five seconds to see the actual video.

Another development is more surprising. YouTube has expanded the Partner Program, which allows contributing users to receive a share of 55% of the ad revenues generated through their videos (Marshall), to all users who upload original videos or videos that they hold the commercial usage rights of. An account needs to have a “good

¹¹⁸ Most of the research for this coda was conducted in 2014. It was updated in June 2016 unless stated otherwise.

standing” with regards to copyright infringements and abiding to the “Community Guidelines,” but the size and sustainability of the viewership are no criteria anymore for enjoying the benefits of revenue sharing anymore (YouTube, “Monetization”, see also Marshall). The amount YouTube charges advertisers depends on the number of monetized video views, that is, on the times that a video is watched with the advertisement. The rate per thousand views, cost per mille (CPM) in advertising jargon, strongly varies depending on the kinds of videos a user produces and on the chief location of her/his viewers. Accordingly, the amount per thousand views handed down to users also varies; it ranges between \$ 0.30 and \$ 2.50 (Marshall).

Support for video contributors

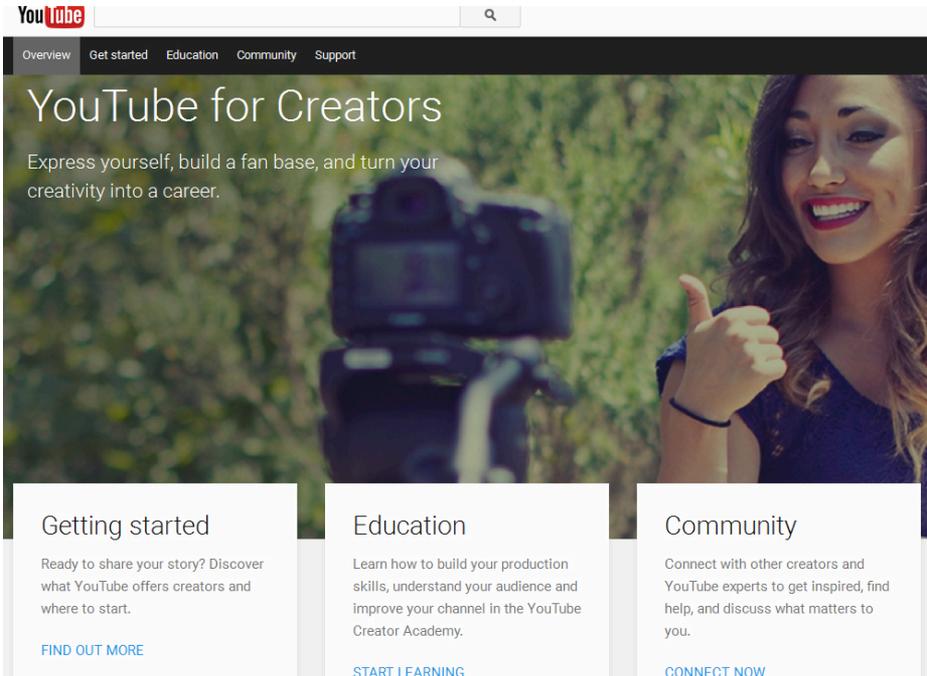
Over the years, YouTube has significantly expanded its support for video contributors. The online part of this is “YouTube for Creators”, a comprehensive section of the website that can be accessed by clicking on a link at the bottom of all YouTube pages (Fig. 8.1). The offline part are studio facilities – called YouTube Spaces – in Los Angeles, New York, Toronto, São Paulo, London, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, and Mumbai which were opened between 2012 and 2016 (Figs. 8.2-4). In the light of YouTube’s infrastructure and business model of providing a platform for others to provide contents, the opening of studio facilities seems like a fundamental change. There are no charges for producing videos at the YouTube Spaces, but a user needs to have at least 10,000 subscribers (“Unlocking YouTube Space LA”).

In the “YouTube for Creators” section YouTube educates users about creative and technical aspects of video production, about building and monetizing viewer bases. There are text and video tutorials and a “Creator Academy” offering online “Courses”. Education also happens offline at the YouTube Spaces in the form of weekly or monthly events (see e.g. “YouTube Space LA”).

Thinking of the extent to which YouTube favored individual user contribution of videos and did not support online collaboration among users in the early years, the introduction of online and offline support for communication and collaboration among contributing users is a significant change. Within the “Creators” section there is a “Community” subsection which invites videomakers to “[c]onnect, collaborate and learn with like-minded creators”. There is also an online forum called the “Official YouTube Creator Community” which is moderated

Coda: YouTube and YouTube Culture Today

by YouTube staff who start discussions and provide advice. Communication and collaboration are fostered at the studio facilities as well (see e.g. “YouTube Space LA”). YouTube appears to have realized that these are important aspects of creative work, not the least in audiovisual production.



8.1 The home page of the “YouTube for Creators” section in June 2016.

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8.2-4 The biggest of about ten sound stages, one of numerous editing suites, and the lobby at YouTube Space LA (“The facility”).

What were motivations for YouTube to increase its support for video contributors, and of opening studio facilities in particular?

In order to attract a lot and lucrative advertising, the company needed to offer ‘better’ and ‘ad-safe’ videos (McDonald 392). Partnerships with established film studios, television networks, and production companies that would have involved upload of their regular contents or dedicated YouTube projects were YouTube’s cherished hopes in this regard (394; van Dijck 121). However, such partnerships proved difficult to establish; and some were spectacular failures, like Oprah Winfrey’s expensive and brief YouTube venture (see Burgess and Green,

“Entrepreneurial Vlogger” 102). Among the 20 most subscribed YouTube channels today, there is only a single channel that is a project from an established film or television company: THEELLENSHOW, the YouTube spin-off of the popular television show hosted by Ellen DeGeneres (Social Blade). What is more, except for individual high profile cases like BROOKERS, such companies did not take on successful YouTube users in a broad fashion to develop YouTube projects or crossmedial projects with them. In order to have a lot of ‘better’ content on the site, YouTube thus began setting its hopes on its established and upcoming contributing users and began ‘cultivating’ these users itself.

There is another development that is relevant in this regard: the appearance of multi-channel networks (MCNs) since 2009. These are companies that offer YouTube contributors support in video production and in building and monetizing their viewer bases – in exchange for a share of the contributors’ ad revenue share handed down from YouTube (“Multi-channel network,” *Wikipedia*). Most of these companies were start-ups. Lisa Donovan, a vlogger from the corpus (LISANOVA), co-founded Maker Studios, the most successful network thus far (“Maker Studios,” *Wikipedia*). Maker was able to attract \$70 million of venture capital, and eventually bought by Disney in March 2014 (Spangler).¹¹⁹ By offering similar services as multi-channel networks – but without taking an additional share of ad revenues – YouTube aimed at cutting these intermediaries out. Several users were disappointed by MCNs over bad service, high rates, and losing control over their YouTube accounts. Pedro Morbeck, for instance, gave voice to his beef with Maker Studios in the video *Maker Studios is a SHAM* (see also “Multi-channel network,” *Wikipedia*). YouTube’s own information with regards to MCNs cautions users to “understand all the pros and cons” – and naturally points to its own support programs for video contributors (“Multi-Channel Networks 101”).

¹¹⁹ Established companies thus did eventually get involved – but only by proxy.

Who is most subscribed today?

Because the most subscribed YouTube channels of a particular period of YouTube's history were the starting point for corpus formation in this study, it may be interesting to also take a glance at the most subscribed channels today.¹²⁰

Whereas YouTube projects created by established studios, networks, and production companies are exceptions among YouTube's 20 most subscribed channels, the situation is different for musicians under contract in the music industry. Such musicians are represented on YouTube through channels overseen by VEVO, a joint venture of Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, Abu Dhabi Media, and Google (Shu). Among the 20 most subscribed YouTube channels are six VEVO channels, for example RIHANNAVEVO and EMINEM-VEVO. YouTube (which is still owned by Google) shares ad revenues generated through music videos and other videos uploaded to these channels with VEVO.

YouTube's own channel YOUTUBE is on #3. The company initially used it to upload behind-the-scenes footage from their offices and company news, such as the famous announcement of being "acquired by Google" (*A Message from Chad and Steve*). During the past couple of years, they began covering events like the YouTube Comedy Week and the YouTube Music Video Awards. They also upload a video 'looking back' at the most successful videos towards the end of every year. Like the increasing involvement in production through opening studio facilities and educating and supporting video contributors, the company's own dedicated and successful participation as a contributor signals a slight shift from the platform model emblematic of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly) towards traditional vertically integrated models of producing, distributing, and exhibiting audiovisual contents.

The biggest group among the 20 most subscribed channels is constituted by eight channels that were started by individual or small groups of self-producing performers: channels that started out as regular video blogs. SMOSH is the only channel from the corpus among them. NIGAHIGA (2006) and JENNAMARBLES (2010) offer subject clips

¹²⁰ YouTube Inc. does not publicize subscriber numbers in the form of a ranking on their site anymore. However, various rankings can be found on Social Blade, a service provider for YouTube users and advertisers. Social Blade was accessed on 9 June 2016; see also Internet Archive, 2 June 2016.

Coda: YouTube and YouTube Culture Today

about relationship and other topics and sketch comedy clips. THE-FINEBROS (2007) and ERB (2010) were each started by a performing duo supported by friends and release various kinds of comedy videos. LADY16MAKEUP (2009) offers makeup tutorials. PEWDIEPIE (2010) – who is on #1 – and ELRUBIUSOMG (2011) specialize in ‘Let’s plays,’ a comparatively new kind of video. For a ‘Let’s play’ the image and sound of the user playing a video game and the user’s spoken commentary of the gaming are captured, sometimes edited, and uploaded to YouTube.

What changes and continuities were there on these channels with growing success? Are these still video blogs today?

The production values of these eight channels have increased over the years. Today, Hecox and Padilla (SMOSH) and Ryan Higa (NIGAHIGA) are producing their sketch comedy and subject clips in studio facilities with professional equipment and crews, which are credited in video descriptions or closing credits. Here are the credits of SMOSH’s *HOW TO BE A YOUTUBE COMMENTER*, uploaded in April 2014:

Cast:

Anthony Padilla as Himself/ Grandpa/ Pewdiepie/ NigaHiga
Ian Hecox as Himself/ Bob Roberts/ JennaMarbles/ RayWilliam-Johnson

Written by: Anthony Padilla, Ian Hecox, & Ryan Finnerty
Produced & Directed by: Anthony Padilla, Ian Hecox & Ryan Todd

Edited by: Anthony Padilla & Michael Barryte
Post Supervision by: Ian Hecox & Ryan Finnerty

AD: Jon Hooker | DP: John Alexander Jimenez
Asst. Camera: Jonathan Joiner | Sound Mixer: Ivan Harder
Grips: Lee Eisenhower and Patrick Egan
Production Design: Chris Newell | Makeup: Paula Barkley
DIT: Shawna Smith | Asst. Editor: Katie Reed
Color: Pretty Moving Pictures | PA: Ryan Sweeney
BTS: Phil Mohr

Coda: YouTube and YouTube Culture Today

Vloggers typically founded companies to organize their efforts. Many are also additionally represented by multi-channel networks or other companies.¹²¹ All of them are monetizing their videos through the Partner Program and via the ways that were, on a smaller scale, already practiced in early YouTube culture: hosting ads on ‘personal’ websites, promoting products in videos, and selling merchandise. Estimates about earnings are occasional news items and suggest that the top YouTube contributors are earning way more than a living (e.g. Jamieson; and Warner).

Because several characteristics of videos on vlogs were the result of scarcity, it would be no surprise if they disappeared with the disappearance of scarcity. Today, domestic settings are not used unless they are motivated by a video project. Hecox/Padilla and Ryan Higa stopped using the cinematography of scarcity; there are mobile shots in their videos which cannot be attributed to a participant that can also be seen in the video. YouTube jump cut editing is not that common anymore; even Nate Burr, who recommended this mode of editing to deal with silent and filled pauses, significantly improved the quality of his spoken presentation and is not using jump cut editing anymore (e.g. *The Ninja Turtle Skateboard Story*).

Sketch comedy clips, subject clips, and parodic performance videos are still common on the eight channels that started out as vlogs and that are ranked among the 20 most subscribed channels. Public diary clips and self/world documentaries are less common. No home dance and lip sync music videos are released on channels that are successful today. Use of copyrighted music without permission from the rights owner was against YouTube’s “Terms of Use” at all times (see Internet Archive, 28 April 2005), but YouTube has implemented an efficient system of dealing with such infringements in recent years. YouTube uses content identification technology and a database with music titles and the names of the respective rights owners to find videos in which copyrighted music was used. Rights owners can decide if they want the video blocked, played without the music, monetized with the revenue split between them and YouTube, tracked, or take no action. Since default policies are also stored in the database, the whole process works automatically (“How Content ID Works”). This system is very

¹²¹ E.g. PEWDIEPIE by Maker Studios (“PewDiePie, *Wikipedia*) and SMOSH by DEFY Media (“Terms of Use,” *smosh.com*).

beneficial to the rights owners of the music. Lip syncers and home dancers hold the copyright of the images they created after all – but they cannot monetize it on YouTube. Bluntly speaking, lip sync and home dance videos are not lucrative for users working at this level of popularity.¹²² As said before, ‘Let’s plays’ are comparatively novel among the popular kinds of YouTube videos.

There are hardly any changes of the cast performing in videos. Hecox and Padilla continue to appear in their videos and also perform multiple characters, just like in the days of scarcity (see credits above). Only occasionally they have guest performers to play additional parts. I have argued that there was always a high degree of awareness about performance, and that performance was used to brand channels (p. 165). Accordingly, it is no surprise that vloggers continued to perform in their videos, and also to perform as personas they had developed earlier and that had proven successful. Hecox’s and Padilla’s young adult personas still appear in many of their current sketch comedy videos. Nate Burr – who is not among the top 20, but who also professionalized and can thus be mentioned here – stuck with his “Hello again” greeting and hand gesture (see e.g. *The Ninja Turtle Skateboard Story*).

The strong intracultural dynamics of YouTube culture has prevailed. YouTube topics are still vividly discussed, and other YouTube contributors are still more commonly parodied than stars from overall popular culture, for example in SMOSH’s tongue-in-cheek tutorial *HOW TO BE A YOUTUBE COMMENTER*, in which they impersonate several successful contributors. Not being on #1 anymore, it actually makes sense for Hecox and Padilla to refer to others (see p. 322).

It would be a matter of debate if all of these channels are still video blogs in spite of changes of production and aesthetics. The transformation of performing videomakers fulfilling all tasks into performing and directing heads of a crew with division of labor seems to signal changes relating to the essence of what video blogging was. Moreover, there is no overall aesthetics of scarcity in current videos on these channels anymore. Down the success pyramid, there are myriads of YouTube channels which are strongly reminiscent of successful

¹²² Such videos are still uploaded by less successful users to YouTube. In March 2014 an executive of Universal Music Group estimated that the music industry was making more money through such “fan-made music videos” than through their regular music videos (qtd. in Eastwood).

video blogs in the days of scarcity. Because of these differences between top and bottom, it appears that successful and not-so-successful video contributors would not be part of the same audiovisual practice anymore. In general, it seems that today no audiovisual practice or form is predominant on YouTube to the degree that video blogging was in 2005 and 2006.

Taking the perspective of video contributors, ultimately, the question of the current 'nature' of channels that started as video blogs is not that important: Creating and showing videos was a dedicated interest of these users in the early days of their YouTube activities, and today they can pursue it on a different level, which suits them after all. From the perspective of viewers, the specific appeal of early successful video blogs – i.e. encountering the use of a new distribution and exhibition medium, creative video production under the condition of scarcity, and massive success – is gone and may be a loss indeed.

Successful video bloggers of 2005 and 2006 today

Who of the video bloggers from the corpus is still creating and uploading videos to YouTube today? Who turned vlogging into a career, like SMOSH?

In line with Burgess and Green I observed that in news media reports success on YouTube was only validated by opportunities to make the pass to traditional media (*YouTube* 24). In 2005 and 2006 there were no expectations in the press that it would be possible to make money and pursue a media career on YouTube itself. YouTube appeared to be for ephemeral popularity – traditional media for a financially viable and sustainable career (see e.g. Clark; Johnson).

Nevertheless, looking at the vloggers from the corpus, it is interesting to see that those for whom YouTube was or became a media career project and for whom YouTube remained the center of activities, did the best career-wise. This comprises not only Hecox and Padilla but also Matthew Lush (GAYGOD), Nate Burr (BLUNTY3000), and Lisa Donovan (LISANOVA). The former three dedicatedly and regularly uploaded videos to YouTube throughout. Looking at numbers of views of their current videos and other sources, it seems that they are making a living (or more) of YouTube ad revenues and other YouTube-related income (Pomerantz; Burr, Interview by Tim Burrowes). As has been said before, Lisa Donovan co-founded Maker Studios, a company supporting other YouTube contributors. She stopped upload-

ing YouTube videos to LISANOVA in 2011, two years after founding Maker. Still, like in the cases of the other three, YouTube remained the focus of her professional activities which culminated in selling the company to Disney in 2014.

Several vloggers stopped producing and uploading YouTube videos on a regular basis because of off-YouTube media projects. Brooke Brodack hit the news as the first vlogger to make the transition to television when signing a development deal with television producer and host Carson Daly. The two projects that Daly involved her in, *It's Your Show TV* and *me.tv*, lasted for only two years ("Brooke Brodack," *Wikipedia*). In retrospect it seems that Brodack's role as a contributor to these sites was to lure YouTube viewers through her popularity.

At the "height" of his YouTube popularity, Paul Robinett "was making about 3000 dollars a month" of current and previous videos uploaded to his RENETTO channel through the Partner Program (*On the Other Side of Success*). He started VloggerHeads, a competing platform. He also designed an app that could record and upload videos. These projects were funded from income he had of previous ventures (e.g. designing a lawn chair) and through investors. All the while he stopped uploading new videos to YouTube and deleted most of his older videos. The "business plan" was to "get enough people using" the platform and app in order to "get advertised." However, there were not enough users for either of these projects. In 2012 Robinett reflected that he had "failed miserably" and that both projects cost him "everything" he got. He also reflected that by leaving YouTube he had "squandered an opportunity to take [his] YouTube popularity and turn into something that could sustain [him] financially." Other vloggers, by contrast, had turned their "little YouTube thing into a career" (*On the Other Side of Success*). He began dedicatedly creating and uploading videos to YouTube again, but his fans had unsubscribed all the while, and his new videos attracted only a fraction of the views of his previous videos after a comparable amount of time.¹²³

In a *Forbes* article released in 2013, Anthony Padilla (SMOSH) reflected on the importance of continuous and dedicated YouTube

¹²³ See e.g. *How I Lost More Than Just My Virginity*, a comparatively successful video by his contemporary standards, which had 2,763 views after five weeks (Internet Archive, 3 September 2014). *Who are you*, for comparison, had 83,607 views after only three weeks (Internet Archive, 24 Aug. 2006).

presence – and on the risks of trying a transition to other media, to television in particular: “We’ve seen other Internet people go to TV – and it’s bad because they take two months off to make a pilot, and their viewers have forgotten about them when they come back” (qtd. in Pomerantz). Such ventures better be successful because it is not easy to come back. While media convergence is certainly a fact in terms of ownership (Google buying YouTube; Disney buying Maker), it appears that – at least in the case of YouTube culture – a specific situatedness of production, distribution, and consumption still matters. It would be worthwhile to situate YouTube culture with regards to the convergence paradigm (see e.g. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture 2*; Murray and Weedon 3–4) in a project with a different scope.

Several vloggers stopped regularly uploading videos or stopped uploading videos to their channel altogether for reasons other than off-YouTube media projects. Because of health problems, creative fatigue, and limited success, Pedro Morbeck cut down his YouTube activities several times. When he returned, the new videos did not reach the same numbers of views as older videos, which further demotivated him (see channel page, Internet Archive, 30 Oct. 2011). Disappointed with the limited support he got from Maker Studios, he deleted most of his YouTube videos so Maker would not benefit from the revenues (*Maker Studios is a SHAM*). In late 2014, he started uploading videos again.

While caring about numbers of viewers to a certain extent, it seems that Peter Oakley (GERIATRIC1927) and Melody Oliveria (BOWIECHICK) never considered turning their videomaking into a career on YouTube or elsewhere. They did not significantly increase their production values and continued to produce videos that were strongly reminiscent of their videos from the early years of YouTube. Oakley regularly uploaded videos until shortly before his death in March 2014 (Chris Green). Oliveria is still occasionally uploading videos today.

Primary Sources

Channels of the Corpus

User name (channels of core corpus in bold)	Account opened	Subscri. ranking May 17/ July 19/ Dec. 31 2006	Videos of 2005 and 2006 ¹²⁴	Unackn. fictional video blog	Primary kinds of videos (see chapter 2.3)
TASHA	9 Aug. 2005	11/x/x	16		home dance and lip sync music video, self/world documentary
CHEDIGITZ	15 Aug. 2005	x/17/x	46		comedy news
THAUMATA	29 Aug. 2005	12/x/x	15		musical performance video, public diary clip
BROOKERS	30 Sept. 2005	9/1/4	42		misc. comedy, misc. music video
SMOSH	19 Nov. 2005	1/2/2	20		sketch comedy, misc. music video
IANH	24 Nov. 2005	x/20/x	13		self/world documentary, public diary clip
DIGITALFILMMAKER	15 Dec. 2005	16/8/17	39		misc. comedy, subject clip
THEWINEKONE	17 Dec. 2005	x/x/5	29		subject clip, public diary clip, misc. comedy, self/world documentary
BARATSANDBERETA	28 Dec. 2005	x/x/7	13		sketch comedy, misc. music video
BOWIECHICK	4 Jan. 2006	6/19/x	85		public diary clip, misc. music video
CUTIEMISH	19 Jan. 2006	x/15/x	20		lip sync music video
GAYGOD	2 Feb. 2006	x/x/8	22		home dance and lip sync music video
TERRANAOMI	23 Feb. 2006	x/11/x	33		musical performance video
MYSTOANDPIZZI	2 March 2006	x/3/x	26		musical performance video, self/world documentary

¹²⁴ I provide the number of videos still online from these years at corpus formation in January 2010 (see pp. 44-45). The URL format for channel pages at this time was [http://www.youtube.com/user/\[USER NAME\]](http://www.youtube.com/user/[USER NAME]). URL formats in 2005 and 2006 were [http://www.youtube.com/profile.php?user=\[USER NAME\]](http://www.youtube.com/profile.php?user=[USER NAME]) and [http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=\[USER NAME\]](http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=[USER NAME]) (see e.g. Internet Archive <http://web.archive.org/web/20051118214456/http://www.youtube.com/profile.php?user=thaumata> and <http://web.archive.org/web/20060926184415/http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=BlackAndRight>).

Channels of the Corpus

BLUNTY3000	12 March 2006	x/18/x	100		stop motion animation, subject clip, public diary clip
MORBECK	15 March 2006	x/16/x	95		parodic performance video, sketch comedy, subject clip
BLAMESOCIETYFILMS	26 March 2006	x/x/20	20		misc. sketch comedy
BOH3M3	30 March 2006	x/6/9	10		public diary clip, subject clip, misc. comedy
EMOKID21OHIO	3 April 2006	13/x/x	22	Yes	public diary clip
LITTLELOCA	3 May 2006	x/10/x	66	Yes	public diary clip, subject clip, misc. comedy
LONELYGIRL15	1 May 2006	x/9/1	66	Yes	public diary clip, self/world documentary, subject clip
LISANOVA	5 June 2006	x/13/10	28		parodic performance video, sketch comedy, self/world documentary
DANIELBEAST	5 July 2006	x/x/12	24	Yes	public diary clip, self/world documentary, subject clip
GERIATRIC1927	4 Aug. 2006	x/x/3	49		video memoir, subject clip
THEHILL88	13 Aug. 2006	x/x/16	10		misc. comedy, subject clip
ABBEGIRL	12 Sept. 2006	x/x/19	9		misc. comedy, public diary clip, musical performance video
WILLIAMSLEDD	23 Sept. 2006	x/x/6	17		subject clip, public diary clip, self/world documentary

Further YouTube Channels

BLACKANDRIGHT. YouTube channel page. Internet Archive, 26 Sept. 2006
<[http://web.archive.org/web/20060926184415/
http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=BlackAndRight](http://web.archive.org/web/20060926184415/http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=BlackAndRight)>.

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<<https://www.youtube.com/user/drunkensnowgirl/videos>>.

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<<https://www.youtube.com/user/elrubiusOMG>>.

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JENNAMARBLES. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016
<<https://www.youtube.com/user/jennamarbles>>.

JONASTKO. YouTube channel page. Web, 16 Jan. 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/user/jonastko>>.

JUDSONLAIPPLY. YouTube channel page. Web, 8 Jan. 2010
<<http://www.youtube.com/user/judsonlaipply>>.

LADY16MAKEUP. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016
<<https://www.youtube.com/user/lady16makeup>>.

MSIVIDEO. YouTube channel page. Web, 8 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.youtube.com/user/msivideo>>.

NIGAHIGA. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/user/nigahiga>>.

PEWDIEPIE. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie>>.

RYANLESLIETV. YouTube channel page. Web, 8 Jan. 2010
<<http://www.youtube.com/user/RyanLeslieTV>>.

SEXXIEBEBE23. YouTube channel page. Web, 22 Nov. 2012
<<http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=sexxiebebe23>>.

THEFINEBROS. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016
<<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheFineBros>>.

TYGERLILLY33. YouTube channel page. Web, 8 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.youtube.com/user/Tygerlilly33>>.

YOUTUBE. YouTube channel page. Web, 11 June 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/user/YouTube>>.

List of Cited Videos

User name	Video title	Upload date	Date of archiving by the Internet Archive (IA) / Date of archiving by the author (RH) ¹²⁵	URL YouTube: http://youtube.com/watch?v= Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/*/http://youtube.com/watch?v=
BLUNTY3000	<i>Being Groped</i>	10 July 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	Ler6sC4ApvM
BLUNTY3000	<i>Better the devil you know</i>	23 Aug. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	cAintzj59eQ
BLUNTY3000	<i>Blunt-Top 2002 – 2006 R.I.P</i>	30 Aug. 2006	13 Aug. 2007 (IA)	J_ZqZUb6-0U
BLUNTY3000	<i>Blunt-Top Destruction - Burn Baby Burn - Part 1</i>	29 Aug. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	z1ZBJl0Bzfl
BLUNTY3000	<i>Blunt-Top Destruction - Burn Baby Burn - Part 2</i>	29 Aug. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	fzlgE2oDE9A
BLUNTY3000	<i>Blunty isn't Australian</i>	26 Feb. 2007	27 Feb. 2007 (IA)	JUCDY0KnXNQ
BLUNTY3000	<i>Chasing...</i>	13 July 2006	3 Mar. 2007 (IA)	7GqMvONWb7Y
BLUNTY3000	<i>Comic-al ... POOS</i>	9 Oct. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	Cn9EpzOz0ow
BLUNTY3000	<i>Driving Insanity</i>	21 Sept. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	7fHUvsGbhyk
BLUNTY3000	<i>Flightiquette</i>	9 Sept. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	-xqpl4XgMDA
BLUNTY3000	<i>Lets just call this one Fagsus 2: electric boogaloo</i>	26 Sept. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	Xw_b9rscKk4
BLUNTY3000	<i>More youtube ranting: How to make better videos!</i>	18 June 2006	7 Mar. 2007 (IA)	Dgi1RVVjDrk
BLUNTY3000	<i>Natural Enemy - Bluntmation</i>	18 April 2006	1 April 2007 (IA)	-gyhLwFX2ul
BLUNTY3000	<i>The Blunt-Top</i>	11 Aug. 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	feSqsS_20iM
BLUNTY3000	<i>The Ninja Turtle Skateboard Story</i>	8 April 2014	18 April 2014 (RH)	zlcsvlbIJzc
BLUNTY3000	<i>The One about Shaved Pussy</i>	12 June 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	lhPjrlwRJ8
BLUNTY3000	<i>Three times a day</i>	23 June 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	qE7EjqOVprw
BLUNTY3000	<i>Vblog – how to be popular on youtube</i>	8 June 2006	11 May 2010 (RH)	RFxh75UjcCE
BLUNTY3000	<i>YouTube SCAMMING</i>	23 Oc. 2006	5 Feb. 2007 (IA)	W4VZ0FjyJKA
BOH3M3	<i>Ahhhhhh Dating</i>	1 Oct. 2006	4 May 2010 (RH)	hLkJi87Lui4
BOWIECHICK	<i>'The driver should be on his way'</i>	22 June 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	G4ZR6fFnnIM

¹²⁵ In the cases of videos for which video pages including the video files were archived by the Internet Archive during the time under analysis or not too long thereafter, I provide the respective dates. In all other cases, I provide the dates I myself archived video pages and video files (see p. 63).

List of Cited Videos

BOWIECHICK	<i>Before school</i>	16 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	cROFvISEbo
BOWIECHICK	<i>BowieChick on BowieChick</i>	18 May 2006	22 Sept. 2006 (IA)	h9ujUPwsf3c
BOWIECHICK	<i>Breakup</i>	20 Mar. 2006	5 Sept. 2006 (IA)	jXe8pyY9G80
BOWIECHICK	<i>Changes</i>	13 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	DTiBMdCx3JU
BOWIECHICK	<i>Don't know what the title should be</i>	14 April 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	6SNwz7mo9Uw
BOWIECHICK	<i>First Videoblog</i>	16 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	lcUR8KGLLGE
BOWIECHICK	<i>I Hate Bra Shopping!</i>	18 Mar. 2013	24 Nov. 2013 (RH)	tlp2Rs28jyo
BOWIECHICK	<i>Little Wonder</i>	3 May 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	ieloQmE6hE0
BOWIECHICK	<i>My room</i>	19 April 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	n6ufkfcU53s
BOWIECHICK	<i>My Webcam</i>	22 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	o32oHGTOzTE
BOWIECHICK	<i>Niece and nameless paper girl</i>	12 April 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	3hYLW2qG3f8
BOWIECHICK	<i>Sucks</i>	13 July 2006	14 Mar. 2007 (IA)	9glHav6Bm60
BOWIECHICK	<i>Weather</i>	16 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	a_bNzTjFVuE
BOWIECHICK	<i>Weird arms</i>	16 Mar. 2006	13 Mar. 2009 (RH)	_HPNkRFeWFc
BOWIECHICK	<i>Welly Welly Welly Welly Well</i>	4 July 2006	11 Jan. 2011 (RH)	wmn3VvEP_J8
BROOKERS	<i>All I want for christmas</i>	24 Dec. 2005	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	P4xN6kFnXuA
BROOKERS	<i>Brookers News</i>	23 May 2006	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	BhoJvfX9Emo
BROOKERS	<i>Butterfly</i>	7 Oct. 2005	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	S8eYjMnsAWQ
BROOKERS	<i>Cell block Tango</i>	1 Oct. 2005	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	N0TR0lrx4Y0
BROOKERS	<i>Christmas morning</i>	26 Dec. 2005	22 Mar. 2007 (IA)	jBAcMRXyF8A
BROOKERS	<i>CRAZED NUMA FAN !!!!</i>	23 Oct. 2005	13 July 2006 (IA)	N6j475Xl1Xg
BROOKERS	<i>EmoSpace</i>	30 Sept. 2005	20. Feb. 2009 (RH)	r9jPNXGgT8Q
BROOKERS	<i>Everything Changes</i>	30 May 2006	7 July 2006 (IA)	ToZQ4qbKJGs
BROOKERS	<i>Im special</i>	15 Feb. 2006	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	umCLk0dhqal
BROOKERS	<i>My united states of...WHATEVA !!!</i>	3 June 2006	17 June 2006 (IA)	SLbFDMplZDs
BROOKERS	<i>Paste !!!!!</i>	15 Mar. 2006	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	tNmbvl2WzUk
BROOKERS	<i>Practice clip</i>	15 Jan. 2006	21 Feb. 2009 (RH)	KWAfcRSIE9c
BROOKERS	<i>Supercalifragilistic-expialidocious</i>	19 May 2006	7 Sept. 2007 (IA)	FJ7xKbENEPY
BROOKERS	<i>That harry potter movie</i>	24 Aug. 2006	4 May 2010 (RH)	rHhRemvtkpU
BROOKERS	<i>V-Clog 2 instruments</i>	12 April 2006	25 May 2007 (IA)	8xb2CUObhzY
BROOKERS	what is...	21 May 2006	¹²⁶	
BROOKERS	<i>Ghetto Space</i>	30 Sept. 2005	¹²⁷	

¹²⁶ Video is no longer online on BROOKERS. Clone of the video was uploaded to the channel BROOKERSFAN1984 on 14 Feb. 2007 (archived 28 May 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRA9ujhls2l>). The user also provides the original upload date.

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DANIELBEAST	<i>Daniel Responds</i>	5 July 2006	27 April 2007 (IA)	Qk316mkquL4
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DANIELBEAST	<i>The Ceremony</i>	6 Oct. 2013	22 Dec. 2010 (RH)	4n0dhLtBbCQ
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EMOKID21OHIO	<i>The Death Of EmoKid21Ohio</i>	26 April 2006	12 May 2010 (RH)	xZ8ISb6IkLA
EMOKID21OHIO	<i>The Return Of EmoKid21Ohio</i>	1 Nov. 2006	19 May 2007 (IA)	LTBzfWYj890
FRED	<i>Fred Loses His Meds</i>	8 May 2008	12 July 2013 (RH)	m9MA0eW8yyw
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¹²⁷ See previous footnote. Clone uploaded to BROOKERSFAN1984 on 24 Feb. 2007 (archived 28 May 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QISwu6Giwtg>).

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LISANOVA	<i>LisaNova takes the Bus</i>	20 June 2006	7 June 2010 (RH)	b4xaZis4YPE
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THEWINEKONE	<i>Hotness Prevails / Worst Video Ever</i>	31 May 2006	18 Oct. 2010 (RH)	w-rcjaBWvx0

¹²⁸ The video was removed as a result of a copyright claim from the rights owners of the music (see video page, Internet Archive, 14 June 2007). A clone of the video was uploaded to the channel ANDII2000 on 17 Mar. 2007 (RH, 4 May 2010 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOX3OmUhQoo>>).

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YOUTUBE	<i>A Message from Chad and Steve</i>	9 Oct. 2006	23 Feb. 2011 (RH)	QCVxQ_3Ejkg

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