

P3

## Appropriating Social Media

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**Social networks and mobile communication are changing both the way the internet is used, and its status as a site and a medium of social engagement. The presentations in this panel deal with practical and artistic uses of the new communication tools and point to their potential for critical reflexion and social change.**

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Designer and Architect  
sb@curatingyoutube.net**Curating Youtube Box  
[CYB]**

Curating Youtube Box [CYB] fills an important void in the modern art business by facilitating a meaningful reaction with regards to contemporary Web 2.0 phenomena such as user generated content. Following the principles of A SPACE INSIDE A SPACE, CYB may easily be installed in the context of a museum, a gallery, a studio or an art fair. CYB enables curators and scientists to present net videos in a format that is adequate to the art business. CYB will be mailed to the interested institutions upon request. The net videos presented in the various exhibitions will be presented in their original size, using apt players and thereby creating a feeling of “authenticity”. The players will be able to present online streams as well as pre-configured offline shows, such as looped playlists. The players will be, due to their user-friendly interface and their broad acceptance, easily controlled by the audience. The possibility of interactions is an integral part of the entire project – To facilitate this, an autonomous tablet computer, offering access to a research database system, will be integrated into the CYB. Using this tablet computer, local curators can fulfill administrative tasks such as the configuration and controlling of exhibitions and secondary materials or the integration of supplementary materials such as texts, portraits, interviews, source studies etc. Visitors can log into the blog system and participate directly (by creating personal playlists, adding comments and links, etc.). Such a presentation enables the curators to make extensive explanation, comments and background information to the individual pieces as well as the overall concepts using text and images.

The project presented was informed by the following considerations, which cannot be discussed in full in this context:

- The design vocabulary that develops in the net is creating its own syntax and its own semantics by means of the usage of the medium. In this way, aesthetic statements are formulated that concur with a world changed by the presence of the net, since they were formulated in the medium that changes this world itself.
- In the design vocabulary of the Web 2.0, characterized by the combination of various elements such as texts, images, movies, sounds, icons and

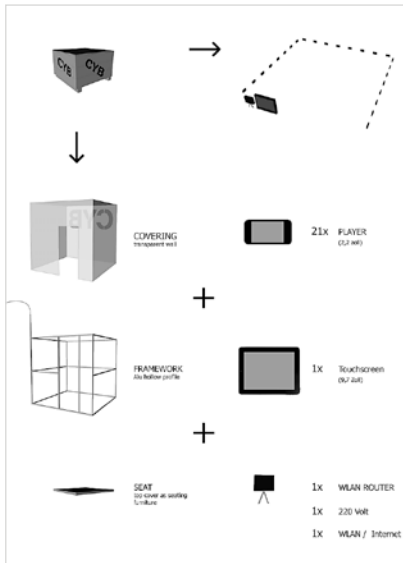


Fig. 1: CuratingYoutubeBox module

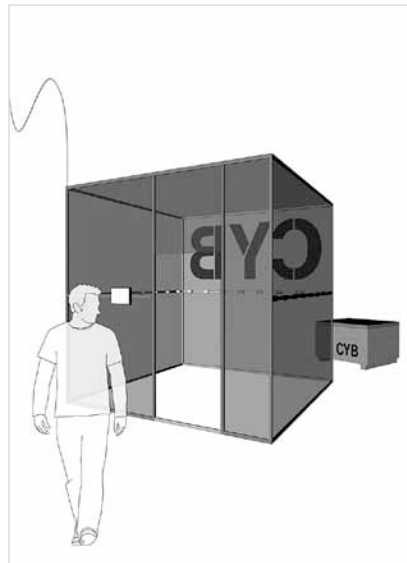


Fig. 2: CuratingYoutubeBox general view

formal language elements, procedural entities (such as the continuous re-workings, media-based translations and extension of net videos) are being formulated and created. These collective, multi-media structures are formed following social, technical, economical and, most of all, aesthetic criteria.

- Aesthetic formulations inside the net play an important role during the process of creating the meaning of culturally relevant terms such as identity, subject, sociability, private, original, capital, etc. They directly influence the discussion inside a society, since a clear distinction between the virtual and the real world can no longer be made.
- The participative character of the design vocabulary turns every use of it into a social activity as well as into an aesthetic self-realization.
- Aesthetic formulations inside the net are imbued with an artistic expression, which, even if they are normally not intended as art works, is as strong as that of the works of canonized artists, if not even stronger.
- Museums are under a cultural obligation to follow, facilitate and communicate the ongoing aesthetic definition and the discussions surrounding the terms that are the corner stones of our culture.

The CYB offers a framework that enables museums to integrate these aspects of our modern culture into their exhibition practice. Today, the internet dominates most relevant areas of our societies – but the net art phenomena have not yet made real inways into the art business. Upon invitation, CYB will actively bring these new net art phenomena into the art scene. The net will spread across the relevant white cube(s) (gallery spaces, museums). The transparent skin of the CYB creates an autonomous structure interfacing with the overlying strata of meaning.

#### References

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## YouTube Favorites = Media Masters

This paper outlines a basic research on visual media culture (a triangulation of media structure- and iconographic research) of the presented online video platform: product analysis of clips with focus on the media structure, analyzing the creative handling of images and the deviations and differences of pre-set media formats and stereotypes by young users.

Web 2.0's communication mainly works through images. The video host YouTube uses this form of visual communication and makes art forms of western societies visible through their online videos especially for young users that provide nearly 75% of the visual content. Generally, a coexistence of different perspectives is possible. YouTube allows polysemic and polyvalent views on the everyday and media phenomena.

The YouTube research ([www.birgitrichard.de](http://www.birgitrichard.de)) started 2006 at the New Media Department of the Goethe University of Frankfurt. The results of the research have already worked out representative forms and basic patterns, as to say, categories for the clips appearing here. These kinds of clips, recurring in the observation period, have an impact on the basic representation of art or the artistic expression within moving images on this platform. Methodologically the focus leads to the investigation (which has to be adequate to the specifics of the medium = as to say media adequate) of new visual structures and forms which can create – consciously or unconsciously – an art form.

### **YouTube-Research: evaluation methods and clip categories**

The examination of YouTube (as well as the photographic community flickr.com, cf./Richard/Grünwald/Ruhl 2007) makes it necessary to sketch a method of evaluation and classification, which is adequate for this special social-aesthetic online phenomenon. Lacking interpretative neutral methods, a mimetic (Amann/Hirschauer 1997:20) form of scientific research is to be aspired, in which the examiners are adjusting to the field, and at the same

time develop empirically founded knowledge about the special cultural system. It is a challenge to obtain basic patterns of artistic representation, which can be categorized with help of the current research project on YouTube and which stay stable categories, despite the constant change of content. This opens up the possibility to refine a typology of representational patterns and conventions. For this goal a double approach seems to be promising: on one hand by means of a representative evaluation, which gives an idea of the quantity of a certain type of video, and on the other hand on behalf of a quality based evaluation by means of selected case studies (see the concept of key-images [in German: Schlüsselbilder] and relational image-



Fig. 1: misheard lyrics 1

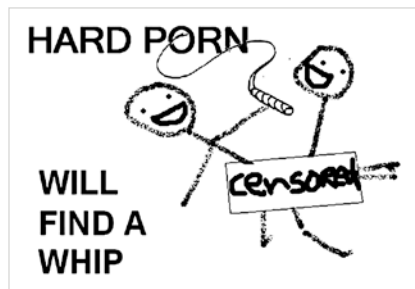


Fig. 2: misheard lyrics 2

clusters by Richard/Zaremba 2007).

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

1. Denomination of the most important tags
2. Parallel evaluation of material on three search modalities:
  - a. through one or several tags. The automated search concentrates on the titles of the clips and the user-given tags.
  - b. on a basis of random checks and within an associative selection of a mind map, as an associative search of synonyms within the content of reference; also looking at the variations of the same user (as author/artist) or related videos (an automatically software generated connection).
  - c. through social bookmarking, looking at user's favorites and following user's recommendations and discussions of videos.
3. Investigation of the tags on behalf of a selection by topic in the found material. The search with tags should lead through step by step condensation of the clip material to the specific case analysis.
4. Selecting the representative clips first according to the frequency of their occurrence and by viewing the content too, sorting them into groups.
5. Choice and creation of the key images of the selected prototypical clips for the analysis.



**Fig. 3: prairie dog drama**

6. The construction of an imagery based clip-typology and the search for divergences of the aesthetic average/stereotypes of the platform, looking for a special artistic quality.

7. Creation of related image clusters following the analysis of the specific nature of images. The concluding statements about the basic patterns in the artistic representation are made at first according to the frequency of their occurrence and then in the next step by analyzing the clips in case studies.

The clip categories, which were developed within the focus of the Frankfurt visual media culture research ([www.birgitrichard.de](http://www.birgitrichard.de)) grasp and extract the basic structures of the platform.

In which way is the modality of this media based image-production with respect to the categories describable? Besides the function of self representation it always gives tribute to the communication of the individual within its community. It opens up possibilities for users to shape the appearance of a particular project via download, editing, and through inserting text, pictures, audio or found footage. Relating to the Web 2.0 this means: the clips as well as the raw material are per se reactive, the user clicks to play them, which doesn't make them interactive. But they function as an active inspiration for users to produce their own responses and participate.

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**Mobile Republic:  
Visual Approaches to  
Discourse in South African  
Mobile Social Networks**

Social networks are believed to broaden participation and deepen democracy, but may play a role in reproducing social divisions. This project highlights the differences between computer users, whose social network use constitutes a form of mediated public, and mobile-centric users (Donner and Gitau, 2009) who primarily access the Internet via their phones, and whose contributions often remain digitally invisible. Mobile social networks serve a growing number of people with limited or no access to computers, who use their mobile phones as a primary form of Internet access, and who often do not use the platforms popular among computer-users. Differences in platform thus inscribe race, class, urban-rural and national divisions.

**Mobile republic**

In South Africa, landlines and computer-based Internet access have been the preserve of a small monied elite. Computer-based social networks (such as Facebook or Twitter) serve only an influential 4% of the population. In contrast, for many young residents of the urban townships of South Africa, the Internet is most accessible via a mobile phone. While many may have heard of Facebook, they are currently more likely to use other Internet-based social networks such as MXit, a low cost mobile instant messaging (IM) application which claims 15 million registered users in South Africa.

While MXit and its competitors (e.g. Mig33, 2Go) have made affordable mobile communication accessible to millions, the lower social status of mobile-centric users is reflected in the relative invisibility of their conversations. From the perspective of public communication, they can also be seen as the 'second-class carriages' of online communication.

On MXit and other South African mobile social networking and instant messaging services, transient mobile chats and IM sessions are not

archived, aggregated, or searchable. Much mobile discourse is thus effectively rendered digitally invisible and seldom makes its way into the broader public sphere or the networked archive. Content and conversations hosted by mobile-centric social networks are not linked to elite social networks, nor are they archived in search engine indexes, and they are also not taken into account by social ranking, recommendation and bookmarking systems. This is not necessarily only a negative trend (since visibility brings with it issues of privacy and surveillance). While Facebook users are concerned about the erosion of their privacy, mobile-mediated discourse is erased from the public record.



Fig. 1: Social distance in geocoded images of Guguletu

### **Public Sphere: South Africans talking politics**

During the 2009 South African national elections, many citizens participated in online debates and political meetings via their mobile phones (Walton and Donner, 2009). Unlike the 2009 Iran elections, where social media communicated the crisis to a global public, the transient conversations of mobile using South African voters took place in read-write-erase mode, and there is almost no record of the powerful engagement in the democratic process which took place in such mobile spaces.

### **Social Fabric: 'race' in social networking**

Applications such as MXit are not simply social networks, which connect people already known to one another, but are also used for social networking, where people use the Internet to make new contacts.

South African social networks are characterised by deep ethnic divisions, entrenched after centuries of colonial rule and four decades of apartheid, when even intimate sexual, marital and familial connections were legislated by overtly racist apartheid laws such as the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act. In the absence of pictures, the usual abrupt chatroom greeting on Mxit is a variant on the global ASL ('what is your age, sex, location'), becoming 'ASLR' ('what is your age, sex, location, race') on MXit (Bosch, 2008). 'Social Fabric' visualises race and gender in personals ads posted to MXit and points to the intransigence of racial thinking.

### **Social distancing in mobile and digital photography**

Access inequalities mean that tourist images of marginal regions currently dominate social aggregators. Figure 1 shows how geocoded tourist photos posted from Guguletu to Flickr favour impersonal distances in choices of shot scale, while photos posted from the same area to local mobile platform The Grid are personal and intimate.

### **Conclusion**

Digital 'invisibility', while not entirely negative, does limit ordinary people's ability to influence public agendas, and to make potentially important connections (whether intimate, personal, professional or civic in nature) with people outside their immediate environment. Mobile networks are currently not designed to make these connections, and this project shows some ways in which mobile users are attempting to make them. The current absence of such mobile users from elite networks and aggregators is a significant silence.

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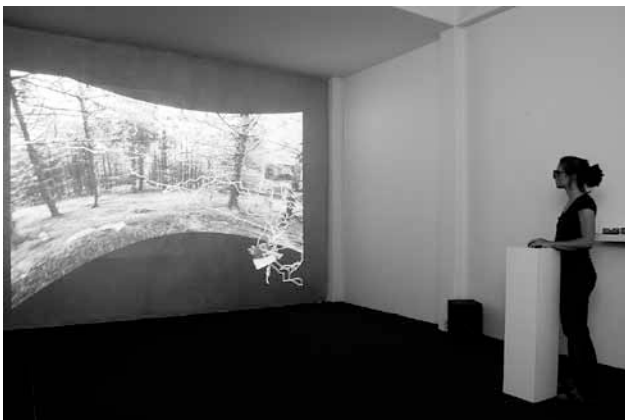
**Art and Politics**

**The Edith Russ Site for Media Art:  
A Space for Presentation and Production  
of Media Art**

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The Edith Russ Site for Media Art is an art institution dedicated to the presentation and discussion of media art. In 1993 school teacher Edith Russ made an endowment to the city of Oldenburg associated with the demand that an institution is going to be established, that focuses on “art on the transition of the 21st century”. With its focus on art and media the Edith Russ Site has an outstanding position in the German museum landscape. It’s a



**Fig. 1: Masaki Fujihata, *Simultaneous Echoes*, 2009** Photo: Franz Wamhof

place for presentation and communication, dealing with the use and reflection of media in contemporary art practice as well as the increasing digitisation and virtualization of our society and the influence of media on our lives. In a regularly changing exhibition program innovative and experimental positions in contemporary (media) art are shown.

With its international residency program the Edith Russ Site for Media Art also has gained reputation as a place for the production of media art. Supported by the Foundation of Lower Saxony, every year three residencies are allocated to artists for the production of a new work. The call for projects is very open and does not distinguish between different categories, because many works are using an interdisciplinary approach. The open structure allows the production of different forms of media based art – from interactive works to software based projects, from sound installations to performative events.

The presentation will show examples from exhibitions (e.g. *Ecomedia\_Ecological Strategies in Today's Art*, *I-Machine\_Robots Performance Fashion Film*, *Landscape 2.0\_Reality and Artificiality of the Landscape*) and projects commissioned or produced at the Edith Russ Site for Media Art (e.g. *Sine Wave Orchestra*, Eddo Stern, Cornelia Sollfrank, uebermorgen.com, Petko Dourmana, Jens Brand).



Fig. 2: Petko Dourmana, *Post Global Warming Survival Kit*, 2008 Photo: Franz Wamhof

The presentation also focuses on the current exhibition *MyWar. Participation in an age of conflict*, a collaboration between FACT in Liverpool and Edith Russ Site for Media Art which is co-curated by Andreas Broeckmann, Heather Corcoran and Sabine Himmelsbach. The exhibition presents contemporary artworks that explore different ways of implication in current or historic wars by degrees of mediation. It tries to pinpoint the moral dilemmas that emerge from the ubiquity of the war condition, and to differentiate between the different levels of implication. The exhibition follows two separate threads. In the first of these, the artists adopt a radically individualistic approach to war. In the second thread of the exhibition, artists directly engage

with the way in which web technologies have infiltrated and influenced global wars. Examples will include works by Harun Farocki, Oliver Laric, S.W.A.M.P, Thomson & Craighead, Milica Tomić and others.



**Fig. 3: Milica Tomić, One day, instead of one night, a burst of machine-gun fire will flash, if light cannot come otherwise, 2009**