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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) 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

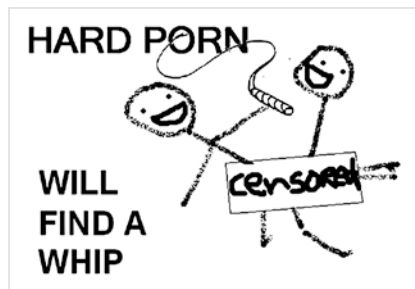


Fig. 2: misheard lyrics 2

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) 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.

References

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