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## From the bedroom to LA: Revisiting the settings of early video blogs on YouTube

Rainer Hillrichs

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The home is only one of many settings in contemporary YouTube videos. On professionalised video blogs, domestic settings are only used when they are motivated by particular video projects. Videos of the popular Let's Play genre may be recorded in the home, but the true settings of the videos are the worlds of the games in which the user acts through an avatar. Music videos on channels by mainstream pop stars, such as RihannaVEVO, obviously feature diverse settings.[1] However, as crucial works of online video studies point out, the home and the bedroom in particular were common settings of early YouTube videos.[2] This article revisits the settings of early video blogs on YouTube and the arguments made about these settings and their cultural meanings thus far. Video bloggers' use of domestic and other settings is a far more complex issue than it may initially appear. Convenience, creative ambitions, viewers' expectations, and emerging conventions intersected in this dimension of video blogging.

In contrast with the notion of 'private spaces' that were 'simply' shown 'as 'they are',[3] I suggest that bedrooms were locations which were willingly, consciously, and performatively put into the scene on video blogs. These locations offered their own materiality and meanings for adoption *or* manipulation. For these reasons, and because videos were typically produced to be publicly shown on YouTube, I challenge the notion of a genealogical relation of video blogs with home movies and home videos.[4] Instead, video blogs should be historicised and contextualised with other public audiovisual practices.

In order to create variety or because specific video projects required different settings, vloggers also began using settings beyond the bedroom. Over the course of time settings appear to follow an expansive outward movement from bedrooms to other settings in the home, to local and regional settings. From mid-2006 on several vloggers got involved with established media industries and shot videos with Los Angeles as a setting. At the same time, people at the margins of the industries who were already living in LA started YouTube projects. Accordingly, the expansive movement appears to culminate in LA, signalling the fast integration of YouTube culture into popular culture at large.

### Corpus formation / terminology

To form a corpus of user channels and videos I looked at YouTube's 'Most Subscribed' of 'All Time' ranking as it was archived by the Internet Archive on three different dates in 2005 and 2006. The focus was set on the first two years of the platform's operation, because previous research had established that the home was a common video setting in early YouTube culture. In order to revisit settings and arguments it was necessary to also deal with this period. I conducted an explorative analysis of the videos uploaded to the ranked channels during these years. I found that there was a majority of channels that shared several traits and a few others that did not share them. These traits were the following: 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; release of videos at more or less regular intervals.

I decided to deal with this predominant group of channels for the main analysis. These 28 channels and the videos uploaded to these channels in 2005 and 2006 (that were still online at the time of corpus formation or had been archived by the Internet Archive) constitute the corpus.

I refer to user channels with these traits as video blogs. For once, such a use of 'video blog' can also be found on YouTube itself. For example, the user Blunty3000 lists 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*. There is also a narrow use of the term on YouTube. Some users refer to individual diarist videos as video blogs, for

example bowiechick (e.g. *First Videoblog*). I opted for the wider use of the term because the same users were producing different kinds of videos and uploading them to the same channels. For example, the user bowiechick also created and uploaded music videos (e.g. *Little Wonder*). In analogy with the term weblog, a video blog can thus be seen as an object comprising various videos with a common authorship and mode of distribution. I use 'public diary clip' for videos referred to by the narrow use of the term. The term 'video blog' is also used in a wide fashion by other researchers, for example by Patricia Lange. According to 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'.[5]

## Bedrooms

Bedrooms are common settings of videos on early video blogs. Opened in November 2005, only a couple of months after YouTube went online, Ian Hecox and Anthony Padilla's smosh is an early and at the same time consistently successful vlog. The duo created and uploaded music videos for theme music from children's television shows and video games of the 1980s and 1990s before specialising in sketch comedy videos. The setting of most of their early and several later videos is Padilla's bedroom in his parents' house (Figs. 1-2). Melody Oliveria aka. bowiechick is a vlogger who inspired many others and primarily used her bedroom as a setting for her diarist videos (Fig. 3). The producing trio behind the infamous lonelygirl15 recognised the bedroom as an important setting of video blogging and reaffirmed its status by making it the prime setting of the character Bree's videos in their unacknowledged fictional YouTube project (Fig. 4).[6] In spring and summer 2006, when YouTube became a focus of news media because of its increasing popularity, it was always noted that many YouTube videos were shot in young people's bedrooms.[7] The bedroom thus seems to hold a special status among all other settings in early video blogging.



Figs. 1-2: 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 (smosh).



Fig. 3: 'Hello, my name is Melody.' The vlogger by the user name bowiechick introduces herself in First Videoblog.



Fig. 4: Bree, the fictional vlogger character who claimed to be running lonelygirl15, introduces herself in First Blog / Dorkiness Prevails.

Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier note that early YouTube videos display 'an endless series of private spaces, especially teenager's bedrooms' and that 'the interiors usually attest to a certain average taste'.<sup>[8]</sup> However, we should not forget that teenagers' bedrooms are, among other things, places of representation. Teenagers decorate their rooms the way they like, with posters

of favourite stars, photographs of friends, and souvenirs. Their rooms are places of identification and distinction. Already, without arranging the room for shooting or the mediation of the camera and YouTube, there is a private local audience for these rooms: the vloggers, their friends, and parents. Above Oliveria's bed there are posters of David Bowie and a Halloween souvenir (Fig. 3); she explicitly introduces these items to her viewers in the video *My Room* (Vid. 1). Above Padilla's bed there are *other* posters, and on the adjacent wall several dozen CDs or DVDs (Fig. 2). What may appear as an 'average taste' from an adult perspective contains specific markers of distinction for teenagers and young adults.

An argument that private spaces and practices were made public on YouTube crystallises around the use of bedrooms as settings. According to Jean Burgess "“privatised” spaces of cultural participation’ increasingly ‘have become “publicised” via webcams, SNS profiles and YouTube’.[9] Peters and Seier maintain that the ‘private spaces’ of bedrooms are ‘often simply [shown] as they are’ in YouTube videos.[10] 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.

His social and political assessment of YouTube is pointed:

[t]he platform invades our privacy, erodes our autonomy, and threatens essential social dynamics such as the need for moments of private non-compliance. [...] It may also be changing our children's identity and their future prospects.[11]

Strangelove does not account for users' agency of representing their world and for their very own decision of uploading (or not uploading) videos. As Rebekah Willett has shown in her study of young people's use of camera phones, video production for circulation within the family and small circles of friends – private reception that is – not only survived the revolution of the tools of production and distribution, it still seems to be the default for most videos created.[12] 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.

All videos of the corpus were publicly shown on YouTube. The vast majority of them were also clearly produced for the purpose of being publicly shown on YouTube, which can be seen, for example, in vloggers' addressing

of viewers as viewers of YouTube videos. Already in *First Videoblog*, Oliveria refers to possible negative ‘comments like: You’re so fat’ and preemptively encourages viewers of her video to ‘be nice’. Vloggers were also careful about the personal information they revealed. Typically, they neither provided their surnames nor the names of the places they lived. Accordingly, I suggest these videos should be seen as public artefacts, not as private artefacts in the tradition of home movies and home videos or as private-artefacts-gone-public. It is problematic to assume that anything in videos produced for public distribution and exhibition (including the setting) is private in an uncomplicated way. 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 but simply take a bed as an indicator of privacy.

Moving from the ontologic objection to production, it needs to be said that it is 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 videos may 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. The use of a ninja sword in Brooke Brodack’s (aka Brookers) lip sync video *Cell block Tango* certainly 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:

[a]nd then he ran into my knife. He ran into my knife ten times. (Fig. 5)

Prepared and unprepared rooms could be manipulated during the profilmic presentation; they could serve as pools for props, for instance. Matthew Lush’s (aka GayGod) untidy room is put into the scene (which is, of course, the literal translation for *mise-en-scène*) in this manner in his home dance videos (Fig. 6). Videos in which vloggers show us around their room and introduce us to furniture and decorations epitomise the fact that these were not only spaces of performance but also performed spaces (see Vid. 1).

Of course, cinematography mattered when it came 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-scène* in bowiechick’s *First Videoblog* is so orderly and organised, centrally placing the vlogger in front of



her bed with the wall decorations also in view (Fig. 3). 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), while other parts of the room are strategically off screen, such as a functional (and not decorative) clothes rail to the right of the discs that is never completely shown in smosh videos. Bedrooms then, like other settings on video blogs, were neither private nor ‘simply’ shown ‘as they are’.[13]



Fig. 5: A ninja sword which was positioned underneath the desk before shooting, to be pulled out in-sync with the lyrics of a song the vlogger was about to lip sync (Brookers, Cell block Tango).



Fig. 6: Using an object lying around in the room as a microphone (Gay God and Alyssa dance to Hellogoodbye).



Vid. 1: Melody Oliveria aka bowiechick introduces her viewers to her room (My Room).

After vlogging for several months Melody Oliveria moved around the furniture of her bedroom and presented the new arrangement to her viewers

(Fig. 7). Nate Burr (aka Blunty3000) offered a remark about vloggers' possible impetus for such changes:

they 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 characterised the practice. Conventions, such as the bedroom setting, and their limitations were reflected on even during their very emergence (see also section 'Conventionalisation' below). Variation and innovation were vloggers' responses.

Appropriating the tactic, the vlogger character Bree (lonelygirl15) redecorated her room three days after the bowiechick video was uploaded (Fig. 8). However, unlike in the former video the transformation of the room itself was presented in the video: as a fast-motion sequence accompanied by non-diegetic music. Thereby the producers of lonelygirl15 achieved a heightened sense of transformation of profilmic space. This is an instance in which the creators of this unacknowledged fictional vlog did not just imitate regular vlogs but creatively worked with their characteristics and conventions.[14]



Fig. 7: Melody Oliveria: 'My desk used to be right there.'  
(bowiechick, Welly Welly Welly Welly Well)



Fig. 8: Bree: 'Today I'm gonna move a few things from this side of the room to that side of the room.' (lonelygirl15, Daniel Returns, and More Interesting Factoids (Yay!))

## 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. Instead of using his bedroom like in his first two videos, Matthew Lush (GayGod) shot the lip sync video *Gay God sings [sic] to Janet Jackson : All For You* in his bathroom (Fig. 9). There does not seem to be a reason why the bathroom and not another room was used in this video. Creating a video with a different setting thus seems to be the response to the desire for variety in this case.

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!* (Fig. 10). Paul Robinett (renetto) shot *Diet Coke+Mentos=Human experiment* in the garden because he was planning to create a liquid sticky mess in the video. These moves were obvious but necessary choices to produce the respective videos.



Figs 9-10: Matthew Lush's Gay God sings to Janet Jackson : All For You and Gay God with friend Alyssa and VEGAN COOKIES!, which were shot in a bathroom and a kitchen respectively.

Use of other parts of the home of course necessitated that they were free to use. In the story world 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 her friend Daniel out for a 'chat' (Fig. 11). The doorstep that he does not cross and that Daniel has to cross to be subjected to his diction seems to separate different spheres inside the house. It is coherent with reference to the story that we never see Bree use other rooms of the house. Brooke Brodack (Brookers) used the

whole house to shoot her videos from the onset. This was probably possible because her mother was working and her father had died.[15] Watching Brodack's excessive and expansive performance we cannot but think of this as a 'home alone' situation, where spatial and other limits have disappeared (Fig. 12). Nevertheless, the notion of a young person's embattled enclave in the house is nowhere as explicit as with lonelygirl15. Accordingly, video bloggers' use of settings was picked up, condensed, and imbued with significance for the story of fictional video blogs.



Fig. 11: Brooke Brodack – home alone – in Im special [sic].



Fig. 12: Bree's dad never enters her room in videos on lonelygirl15 – and Bree never uses other rooms of the house to shoot 'her' videos.



Fig. 13: Brooke Brodack's friend Ben in Butterfly dangling from a rack on a playground (Brookers).

## Local and regional settings

Vloggers also shot videos outside their homes. Some of the footage for the music video *Butterfly* (Brookers) was shot at home, and 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. 13). Hecox and Padilla (smosh) shot *The Best Car EVER*, a sketch in which a car dealer tries to sell a regular car as a racing car, on 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 (*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 (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14: Paul Robinett is about to visit a tanning studio – and to shoot a video documenting the visit (renetto).

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 into 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* 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 – which were released as *Smosh Short 2: Stranded* and *The California Stereotype Experiment* (Fig. 15) 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 benefitted from the change of place and turned it into video 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 Do-



novan (LisaNova) was a struggling actress who discovered YouTube during this time.[16] *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 a lot of attention from established media companies in the spring and summer of 2006. Individual vloggers like Hecox and Padilla (smosh) Brodack (Brookers) had meetings or even struck deals (for example like Brodack, to produce content for other outlets).[17] People from the margins of the industry opened YouTube channels as well. It seems only natural that LA settings increasingly appeared on video blogs.



Fig. 15: ‘Hi, we’re here at the beautiful Santa Monica Beach in LA.’ Ian Hecox at the beginning of *The California Stereotype Experiment* (smosh).

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.[18] When Melody Oliveria shows her neighbourhood in the video *The driver should be on his way*, this merely seems to be to situate ‘her’ home in ‘her’ neighbourhood rather than in a neighbourhood in a town or city identified or identifiable by name. Safety concerns are relevant in this context, but this seems to be

only part of the answer since American vloggers also rarely mention the state they are living in, which would to a large degree have retained their privacy.

Some time after *lonelygirl15* was revealed to be fictional, the producers 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 her friend 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 can recognise Southern Californian landscapes and cityscapes, for example in *On The Run*. The reason is, of course, that the whole production was based in 'the greater Los Angeles area'.<sup>[19]</sup> However, in correspondence with the all-American story world of the project and the curious state of the home in video blogging the profilmic locale is never identified as Greater Los Angeles. Strictly speaking, it is not the place the story is set.

A vlogger's home – with the bedroom as its prime setting and the neighbourhood as its surroundings – is a setting which 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. Los Angeles, as the prime site of the American film and media industry, thus occupies a special and odd status in this arrangement.

## Neutralised 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 remain identifiable as bedrooms, kitchens, playgrounds, or tanning studios. However, there are also several videos for which vloggers neutralised 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. 16). For *Renetto... The Rambling Story of My Life.. So Far...* the vlogger used a dark background and lit himself in a manner that makes the background turn into a uniform black, so we cannot see any surface structure (Fig. 17).



Figs 16-17: Paul Robinett neutralised existing locales for two of his renetto videos.

Constructed settings were uncommon in video blogging in 2005 and 2006. The reason was probably a lack of finance – after all, YouTube only introduced ad revenue sharing in 2007.[20] The producers of *lonelygirl15* did not fully construct Bree’s bedroom setting either but decorated the bedroom of one of them in a ‘girly’ manner.[21] Probably because constructing a profilmic setting was more expensive and time-consuming than creating a virtual *mise-en-scène* through compositing, the latter technique was in effect as common as the former. Pedro Morbeck created travelling mattes

of himself for several videos using a blue screen. For *My Real Sex* a travelling matte of himself performing as his fictional vlogger character Chipmunk Chick was superimposed onto a still image of a pool (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Composite shot from *My Real Sex* that was created using a blue screen (morbeck).

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 video blogging. The materiality of his bedroom was deemphasised in Morbeck's Chipmunk Chick videos (Fig. 18); its function as a site of production – an informal studio – became visible in *Behind the scenes look* (Fig. 19). In particular, teenage and young adult vloggers still living with their parents edited their videos on their computers in their bedrooms, even if the footage was shot in other locations (e.g. thew-inekone, *Campus Tour*). Accordingly, not only are bedrooms on video blogs not private they are also not unambiguous places of recreation either, but they function as sites of audiovisual production.



Fig. 19: Pedro Morbeck's Behind the scenes look: 'And I set up a blue screen here so that I can make those chroma key effects.' (morbeck)

## Conventionalisation

My analysis makes sense of vloggers' choices of setting in terms of an expansive movement with the bedroom as its starting point. Nevertheless, there were also vloggers who seem to only have discovered the domestic setting after producing videos for a while. Joining in December 2005, Tony Huynh (thewinecone) was an 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 Lego stop-motion animation. Only in June 2006 he began to shoot videos in which he spoke about various topics – videos set in his apartment. Thus setting is an aspect that allows us to gain insights about the evolution and conventionalisation of video blogging in general. Inspired by pioneer vloggers like 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 the spring and early summer of 2006 and released videos that used a domestic setting, for example Matthew Lush

(GayGod), Paul Robinett (renetto), and the producers of lonelygirl15. 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 conventionalisation 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 by bowiechick and lonelygirl15 in July, and the expansive outward movement to find other settings.

## Style

Assumptions about vloggers' increasing creative ambitions and about their own and their viewers' needs for variety underlie this article's analysis of settings in terms of an expansive movement. There was 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 appeared again and again. A succession of smosh music videos for theme music 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 other similar video projects. In *Power Rangers Theme*, *Mortal Kombat Theme*, and *Pokemon Theme Song* the vloggers playfully put Padilla's bedroom into the scene. In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme* and *Transformers Theme* they gradually disposed of the bedroom as a setting. While the title of *Turtles Theme* promises another nostalgic music video set in Padilla's bedroom, the video itself begins with a narrative non-music video segment in which the vloggers play frisbee in a forest. Once a sewage pipe miraculously brings them back to the bedroom, a second segment – the actual music video – starts. Nevertheless, in the second segment, settings other than Padilla's room can also be seen (see Vid. 2). 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.



Vid. 2: smosh's Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Theme. The last in a series of smosh music videos with Padilla's bedroom as a setting.

## 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',[22] I have demonstrated that bedrooms were willingly, consciously, and performatively put into the scene on video blogs. A few vloggers even neutralised bedrooms through selective framing or lighting, or constructed virtual settings through compositing. The bedroom setting was a convention and recognised as such within video blogging itself; variation and innovation were vloggers' responses. Besides its function as a setting the bedroom also functioned as the prime site of production of video blogging, as a studio and as an editing room.

To create variety or because specific video projects required different settings, vloggers began using locations beyond the bedroom. Over the course of time settings appear to follow an expansive outward movement from bedrooms to other settings in the home, to local and regional settings.

Because several vloggers got involved with the established media industries and shot videos with Los Angeles as a setting from mid-2006 on, and people at the margins of the industries who were already living in LA started YouTube projects, the expansive movement appears to culminate in LA, signalling the fast integration of YouTube culture into popular culture at large.

Typically, videos on video blogs were produced to be publicly shown on YouTube. It is problematic to assume that anything in videos produced for public distribution and exhibition, including the setting, is private in an uncomplicated way. Accordingly, these videos should neither be seen as private artefacts in the tradition of home movies and videos[23] nor as private artefacts that have gone public,[24] but as public artefacts in the first place. Video blogging in general needs to be seen in the context of historical and contemporary practices in which audiovisual artefacts are created for public distribution and exhibition.[25] On that note, filmmakers' use of their own homes is not foreign to other public audiovisual practices either: Kenneth Anger shot his experimental film *Fireworks* (1947) in his parents' home while they were away over a long weekend, and Joss Whedon shot his Shakespeare adaptation *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012) entirely in his house and garden.

The settings of videos on early video blogs are a far more complex topic than they may appear on first encounter. Convenience, creative ambitions (video projects, changing and consolidating interests), viewers' expectations (both of continuity and variety), and emerging conventions intersected in this dimension of the audiovisual practice of video blogging.[26]

## Author

Rainer Hillrichs researches and teaches film and new media at the University of Mannheim (Germany) and the University of Vienna (Austria). He is interested in the affordances of (new) media and the ways in which they are put to use. A specific interest is the emergence of conventions and the relationship of these conventions with those of older media. He holds a PhD from the University of Bonn (Germany). His dissertation *Poetics of Early YouTube: Production, Performance, Success* was published in open access in 2016. In 2011 he was a doctoral research fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara.



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## Notes

- [1] See Social Blade, 'Top 10 YouTubers by Subscribed', 8 July 2016.
- [2] E.g. Burgess 2008, p. 106; Peters & Seier 2009, p. 193; Strangelove 2010, p. 204.
- [3] Peters & Seier 2009, p. 192.
- [4] Strangelove 2010, pp. 40-41.
- [5] Lange 2008, p. 87.
- [6] On lonelygirl15, a channel opened in May 2006, a young woman named Bree appeared to be talking about everyday topics. Doubts about her identity and claims of producing the videos and running the channel grew slowly. Eventually, in September 2006, tech-savvy viewers were able to track lonelygirl15 to an IP at the Creative Artists Agency. Shortly thereafter three men in their twenties with disparate backgrounds stepped forward and revealed that they were running the channel and producing the videos. lonelygirl15 was a fictional web series in which Bree was played by an obscure actress (Rushfield & Hoffman 2006).
- [7] E.g. Heffernan 2006; Kornblum, 'Now Playing on YouTube', 2006.
- [8] Peters & Seier 2009, p. 192.
- [9] Burgess 2008, p. 106.
- [10] Peters & Seier 2009, p. 192.
- [11] Strangelove 2010, pp. 40, 63.
- [12] Willett 2009, p. 226; see also Pini 2009, p. 81.
- [13] Cf. Peters & Seier 2009, p. 192.
- [14] See endnote 7 for an introduction of the lonelygirl15 project.
- [15] Brooke notes these details about her family situation in *Everything Changes*.
- [16] Wallenstein 2010.
- [17] See Clark 2006 and Martin 2006.
- [18] E.g. Kornblum, 'YouTube Launches Its Own Web Stars', 2006.
- [19] Rushfield & Hoffman 2006.
- [20] See YouTube Blog, 3 May 2007.
- [21] Davis 2006.
- [22] Peters & Seier 2009, p. 192.
- [23] Cf. Strangelove 2010, pp. 40-41.
- [24] Cf. Burgess 2009, p. 106.
- [25] For an analysis of various aspects of early video blogging and an elaboration of this particular argument see Hillrichs 2016.
- [26] My gratitude goes to Nina Noelle, one of my students at the University of Mannheim, who provided useful feedback for a draft of this article.