



NEW AMERICAN GRAND TOURS AND TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF VIDEO BLOGGERS

Leisure, Cultural Myths and Crisis Management in Visual Storytelling

INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH FIELD AND RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Neither were Americas the destination of the historic Grand Tours nor were Americans their protagonists. This was a very European idea: the tours were undertaken by Europeans (to become worthy of the name of a comprehensively educated person), and it was Europe that was both the destination and the object of interest (Mączak, *Odkrywanie Europy*; Adler, “Origins of Sightseeing”). This process gained strength in the Renaissance and Baroque periods and has been continued to some extent in various forms to this day, although the term itself is used to denote 16th- and 17th-century educational journeys of young noblemen for whom the Grand Tour (i.e. distant and long-lasting) was to be a liminal experience, a rite of passage into adulthood, also in the sense of acquiring a variety of cultural experiences, acquaintances and good manners, as well as comprehensive knowledge useful in a further professional career (Mączak, *Peregrynacje*).

Today’s educational trips rarely have this versatile and in-depth nature, tourism has become an area of mass consumption (Urry), and the ease and speed of transport does not necessarily deepen the reflections of young travelers. However, if today one seeks for a culturally common form of a long journey and the accompanying reflection similar to the Grand Tour phenomenon, one should focus on the blogosphere, and particularly the vlogosphere. Vlogs are a kind of culturally sanctioned form of contemporary description of the world, which take into account dominant media formats and narrative formulas answering to the needs of contemporary participants of the communication process. In the 16th and 17th centuries a similar function was performed by journals and travel memoirs filled with descriptions of both real

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and imagined experiences in distant countries, to the delight of various circles of recipients, for whom they constituted a kind of literature with educational and at the same time entertainment values, and often also with a community-forming dimension (Maj, *Media w podróży*). Today, all these functions are fulfilled by the vlogosphere: providing knowledge, entertainment, but also a sense of belonging to specific virtual communities.

Although the vlogosphere as an area of cultural practice is a relatively new space, related to the technical capabilities of the post-2005 Internet (the emergence of YouTube) and the rapid transmission of images and the development of mobile media in the last two decades, it is nevertheless an area of continuous redefinition of communication behavior by means of new technologies. We witness the appearance of new platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, etc.) and links with other services and social networks, new technical possibilities, such as the use of drones, video streaming, incorporation of artificial intelligence in video transmission or the emergence of AI-based virtual influencers competing with people for the attention of recipients, and all of them are accompanied by new cultural patterns (Ameen et al.). In this context, not only are the mass social phenomenon and the influencer marketing industry developing, but also the research on them (in marketing, psychology, media studies, sociology, etc.). Researchers try to describe the complexity of the phenomenon of network gatekeeping, which includes the creation of network video narratives (vlogs)—they create influencer typologies and conduct research on the relationship between creators and recipients of this type of content, as well as attempts to model effective communication behavior in this area (Chung & Cho 481–495). It is noted that various vlogs perform different functions, and the popularity of the message or their authors does not necessarily translate into the success of the brand and the product they advertise (Magno & Cassia 288–290).

In this study I focus on Polish vloggers' activities and manners of telling stories which belong to European narratives of contemporary travelers using new media and typical for this genre narrative forms. A certain visibility of cultural myths and stereotypes can be correctly identified primarily in one's own cultural space, which is the main reason for this choice of the research subject. Another issue is the participation of the studied group in a wider community of global media users and, to some extent, universal pop culture dominated by American content. Perhaps (and this is my hypothesis) this is why America, or rather the Americas, often become a Grand Tour destination—although long journeys can also concern Asia or Australia, they are of a different

nature than the ones around the Americas, which verify the identity of Europeans and demythicize cultural messages of the Western world. In this study I argue that for Polish vloggers, America still functions as a symbol of a Grand Tour to the land of freedom, where human resourcefulness and entrepreneurship are not limited and everything is possible. Even if they do not perceive any of these distant continents as a paradise (which was common for the 19th-century Polish immigrants from Galicia to the US) or as hell (this is how Polish immigrants perceived Brazil at that time) (Szejnert), today, despite numerous crises and better knowledge of the world, North America (or rather Canada and the US) remains a symbol of success and freedom, whereas South America and Central America—a symbol of exotic adventure and encounter with nature.

The Americas constitute a world that is close and distant at the same time, both in terms of geography and culture. Europeans' travels around both of the continents bear the hallmarks of a double clash of civilizations and of confrontation with one's own ideas created on the basis of contacts with the media and culture of the Americas. Contact with the media is of paramount importance for modern travelers: primarily with the Internet (especially forums and films) and with film productions reproducing the American dream, mythicizing and demythicizing it at the same time. Today, the journey to the western hemisphere is primarily a clash with the myth of America and simultaneously a story about the role of a blogger as a narrator consolidating their audience and network community in the role of subjects looking behind the horizon and behind the scenes of the "real America."

In the web stories North America functions primarily as a place of encounters with wildlife and vast areas of the far North in Canada or the central states of the US, but also of a clash with the images of the metropolis, headed by New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Washington, which constitute specific texts of modern mass culture, such as images produced in Hollywood. It is also a confrontation with the cultural differences of the multicultural but primarily Anglo-Saxon world, exposing the aspect of proximity and paradoxical cultural distance.

Travels to Mexico and Mesoamerica are of a different nature: the experience of contact with ancient monuments is mixed with a series of multi-sensory experiences of the richness of nature and contemporary culture, although often perceived through the prism of folk culture and cultural traditions. These elements are also characteristic of experiencing South America, along with its diversity and exoticism

(or different exoticisms (“The Tourist Image,” Segalen, Yu)), which can undoubtedly be attractive to the recipients of videoblogs also in the visual or cognitive aspect.

ON METHODOLOGY

The research is based on the triangulation of methods used in the cultural studies area: compositional and content analysis of audiovisual messages (Rose, Monaco, Bergstroem, Lutz & Collins), narratology (Propp, Ball, Tkaczyk) and netnography or digital ethnography (Pink, Kozinets, Jemielniak). Combining several methods allows for simultaneous examination of the digital message from different perspectives (content analysis and narratology) and determining which elements have a community- and worldview-forming value (through studying a network community). This combination makes it possible to examine the complexity of the communication situation in which a travel vlog assumes a role of the message.

Compositional and content analysis enables understanding the process in which an audiovisual message is created on the technical level (film and photography, music and sound, or montage). Narratology adds the value of deepening the analysis by giving the ideas about the presented story, its cultural and emotional content, on the screenplay level (the temporal composition and the dynamics of the narrative resulting from the story told, which are accompanied by cinematic means of time—management such as editing, motion or tempo). Narratology gives—broader than the film production—a cultural heritage perspective, the connection between digital narratives and other historically and culturally based narratives (myths, traditional media stories and their types, heroes and toposes). Netnography gives the third perspective, an anthropological understanding of the social context of the communication process. It allows one to understand the interactive and technology-based process of creating the narrations and virtual communities around it. It drives attention to the fact that the communication leader has to formulate the main characteristic of the community values and rules of communication within the group. Being a communication leader (vlogger-traveler or other type of influencer) means something more than simply gatekeeping or trying to become a social media celebrity. The role of the communication leader is similar to the community creator, enabling globally dispersed people to gather around a common “digital fire” for storytelling, gossiping and value creation.

Compositional and content analysis tools that were used include 1) the analysis of the language of the medium: frames, editing, light, contrast, colors, movement, movements of the camera, sound, audiovisual effects, and other film and photography language means; 2) the analysis of the creative process, analysis of the context of creation and dissemination and the compositional analysis of selected frames from selected video materials; 3) the content analysis of video materials (what is shown, how often, in what order and perspective and how), the analysis of the gazes and their cultural meaning in the AV material; 4) comparative analysis of film means used on different platforms.

These methods have been widely used in film and media studies and art history for years. Nevertheless, they are developing together with new media digital language and new functionalities on different platforms. The paper presents conclusions from the analyses mentioned above. Regular observations of the given vlog had been carried out for three years in several intense few-month sessions in which various aspects were researched (2021–2023). For this study, the most important were content analysis and comparative analysis. The analyses of certain AV materials on the level of technical means, especially the use of film language, and the analysis of the creative process and its contexts were treated as additional analytical tools which helped to understand the specificity of the presented YouTube channel.

Narratological tools used here are the analysis of the storytale elements and characteristics of the story, its protagonists, types of dynamics, storytelling techniques and marketing effects, and comparative analysis of the storytelling on different platforms. These methods have been widely used in anthropology and folklore studies and literary studies, and—recently—in marketing studies and marketing new practices, especially in the context of digital narratives in social media. The analysis of storytelling in the vlogosphere had been conducted for three years in several sessions and concentrated on various videoblog channels and AV materials. For this study, the analysis was necessary on the level of identification of presented and promoted ideas and the ways of telling the story of American and global problems (intercultural dialogue, perception of the Americas and their subregions or specific American countries by the Western societies, tourism and the media, culture & nature, ecology and overlanding travels).

Netnography or digital ethnography tools used here include virtual communities analysis, analysis of acts of communication, types of interaction, specific behaviors and reactions of the leader/gatekeeper, roles in the community, problem-solving in the community, community values and rules, typical and atypical behaviors,

comparative analysis of interactions on different platforms. Ethical problems connected with the analysis include the informal character of communication of specific individuals, the necessity of anonymization, the dependence of content and the community communication on the platform provider. The steps for netnographic analysis included the formulation of the research problem, identification of the virtual community for observation, observation and preparation of the notes, systematic analysis for a particular time (here, three one-month sessions of systematic observation plus the analysis of the public record of communication acts from the channel history), the formulation of the theses, the verification of observations and conclusions. The method is used in digital media studies and anthropology or marketing studies and is the newest method used for complex analysis of virtual communities. Here it was applied to understand what is essential in the communication process to formulate the virtual community around a vlogging traveler, the specific role of the chosen influencers (expert, opinion leader and community creator), and the communication tools they use to obtain their goals. This level of analysis allows for understanding of the relationship between the vlogger as gatekeeper and their virtual community as an audience and, thus, the dissemination of the ideas of cultural dialogue, sustainability, freedom, patriotism and so on.

Using several analytical methods does not allow for very detailed presentation of all stages of the analytical process in one essay, therefore I have focused on presenting the results of the analyses instead. However, it permits a better understanding of the complexity of connections between the medium and its language, the technology itself, the messages, the story and its creator, the values and ideas, and the people who gather around a particular vlogger to create a community for specific reasons.

TYPES OF TRAVELS AND TRAVEL STORYTELLING

The analyzed material allows to distinguish various narrative ways used by vloggers to build audience engagement through creating the narrative tension and controlling it. The topics referred here include the paradoxes stemming from the clash or confusion between the time for leisure and the time for work, as well as the necessity of multitasking, constantly observing and telling about the observations. All activities of a vlogger, even free discovery and crisis management, turn out to be not only a participant observation (a paradox of field work well-known in anthropology) but also self-reflexive partici-

pant meta-observation. The categories of “spontaneity” and “crisis” in the context of vlog narrative thus become problematic, because the boundary between improvisation and staging is fluid.

Visual storytelling as a narrative method has both limitations and technical conditioning, which must be accompanied by awareness of the medium language. The analyses indicate that this awareness among travel vloggers is built gradually, with different dynamics, we can also often observe some progress from amateur to semi-professional or even professional work. However, this requires time and commitment or technical support from a skilled film crew, whose existence is usually meticulously concealed in the context of travel narrations. The vlogger’s materials cannot remind the audience of a film or television production, as this could expose the vlogger as a media actor (Feng et al., Chung & Cho 481–495).¹ Meanwhile, the unwritten condition for the community to follow a given vlogger is to trust them as a bottom-up authority, a human being “like us,” who could be a companion of (our) journeys. Credibility and simplicity are the basis of the authority of the sender understood in this way (Maj 1–13).²

The implementation of the vlogger’s message depends on the author’s approach, but also on the style of traveling, observed by Adler (“Travel,” 1382–1383) and the level of professionalism of the vlogger-traveler activity. Several attitudes can be distinguished here that allow for the creation of travel typologies similar to traditional typologies (as described by Podemski 208–316), which in the context of online activities can be combined with various types of influencing, as Morteo suggests. In the Polish vlogosphere, one can also indicate various types of approaches to the subject of traveling, including the American journey. The review of popular Polish travel vlogs dealing with “trips to America” or “travels around Americas” allows to indicate several dominant trends of traveling and of online audiovisual narrative

1 Although there are many models for vloggers narrations, the concept of trust and authenticity is the most important here, especially in the context of giving advice or documentary relation from a certain destination. It does not mean that the question of film production or film equipment is not important or often addressed (the films are the proofs that the gear is of a certain quality), or that there are not different types of narrations on YT—but they are less successful in the context of traveling and creating community around travels as a subject. This is typical for general relations between influencers in social media and their public.

2 In the case of the most successful Polish travel vlogs which create the strong and supportive virtual community it seems that professionalism at a certain level is required, but it cannot exceed the specific “uncanny valley” of the network media message, which cannot be too similar to its model genre reference, i.e. television message.

about traveling (mainly on YouTube, but also on Instagram, Patronite or Twitter).

The exploratory type of traveling and travel storytelling can be indicated—it is important to cover a long-distance route in this case. It is a kind of Grand Tour in terms of distance, duration, effort and cost, but also of the promise of the reward (in the form of in-depth knowledge of the world and extraordinary experiences) (Kerckhove 66).³ It is most often overlanding in America or Americas—traversing one and/or two (three) continents (e.g. *Busem przez świat* [Around the world by van]: “Through 3 Americas in a van,” *PoDrodze* [OntheWay]: “Arkady Fiedler: both Americas in a small Fiat”), and not a real exploration of unknown lands (of which there are few left in the world today). Overlanding allows for a certain freedom and contingency of travel, which is *de facto* not included in extreme trips, the purpose of which is to implement a specific plan or sports goal (and everything is subordinated to them).

The second type of traveling and travel storytelling can be called a cultural journey or a cultural analysis. A clash of civilizations, sometimes a conflict, or all cultural differences and situations of surprise are exposed here. They can result from both similarities and differences between cultures, such as similarities and differences in terms of space, technical solutions or cultural patterns that are revealed during encounters with people. They are emphasized and subjected to a more or less in-depth analysis by the narrator (who acts as an authority) and then often by the narrator’s audience. A cultural dialogue is also an important element of travel ideology, and the essence of traveling is curiosity—thus, trying to interpret a foreign culture is one of the most important challenges facing the vlog narrator and the recipients. The type of this narrative applies both to travels to Canada and the US, as well as to countries in South and Central America.

The third type of traveling and travel storytelling is an original video diary (it applies to beginners as well as advanced vloggers followed by a large community that demands materials, it is created every day). It is focused on the author and their interpretation of the world, as well as on constant contact with the audience. Life in exile combined with traveling constitutes another type, i.e. a grand trip (related to work or education) and tourism as part of it. This is the way a lot of vloggers start their activity, which then evolves in a specific direction. Another type is traveling in search of traces of Polishness (familiarity)

3 The so-called *cliffhanger effect* which helps to attract the audience’s attention and follow long multi-element stories is also important.

in foreign countries. This is a grand topic of discovering the traces of various generations of immigrants and meeting them, sometimes it is combined with assistance to local communities. Distinct types of vlogs include: a journey focused on tourist values (a guidebook style) and a journey with aesthetic dominance.

This list can probably be continued endlessly, but my primary goal is to indicate the most common threads and types of narratives. They are sometimes mixed in different proportions by different authors within one vlog (video) or channel (series). The question of typology can also be approached differently, leaving aside the goals or features of the narrative and the journey itself. However, it seems that while, for instance, sociological factors can be important for the audience in the process of projection-identification, the types of narrative present higher analytical value than the sociometric indicators.

In the context of cultural and media analysis the most interesting seem to be those journeys and narratives which include certain elements of cultural analysis or at least an original attempt to interpret the world. They demonstrate different qualitative levels in the sense of deepening (or lack of deepening) the author's knowledge on a given topic, they represent different styles of both the journey itself and the communication with the recipients. Some authors have educational background and knowledge that allow them to deepen their reflection, others consider it unessential, choosing an affective approach to cultural differences and the journey itself (it is important for them to feel the world and others, to share their travel impressions). The latter approach is much more common, although in the case of long journeys, which one needs to prepare for, the former approach is also found. The cultural capital of a vlogger and their age (maturing into a story and a tendency to reflect) are not insignificant, either.

Busem przez świat and *Planeta Abstrakcja* seem to be an interesting material for the analysis of travel vlogs. I find the sociological similarity of the authors (two couples of similar age, educated, from a medium or large city) interesting—this correspondence, however, does not generate the same stories, as I will try to demonstrate in the following analysis. Both vlogs can be classified as culture-oriented, with an element of the author's interpretation of the world, but the former goes in an aesthetic direction, while the latter can be seen even as anthropological.

BUSEM PRZEZ ŚWIAT: "INDIANS ARE SUCH A SAD STORY TODAY"
(LEWANDOWSKI #23)

The biggest challenge is undoubtedly storytelling about foreign cultures, and vloggers deal with this task in various ways, e.g. by talking to immigrants—and in the case of Polish vloggers, America abounds in Polish diasporic resources. Such meetings are both helpful and add an element of a story depicting a happy protagonist who immigrated to the land of freedom or exoticism. At the same time, in the case of *Busem przez świat*, it can be said that such meetings dominate, and therefore contacts with foreign culture are largely mediated.

Busem przez świat, created by Karol and Ola Lewandowski, is a travel vlog created in various corners of the world, including a significant “van journey through 3 Americas,” which is divided into 3 stages. The vloggers have already traveled by van around the US and have even published a guidebook “US for 8 dollars a day,” therefore they consider themselves experts. This is an example of a low budget trip, a kind of camping or overlanding, with frequent overnight stays at places belonging to Polish diaspora representatives. On each trip the vloggers take a few of their fans/recipients who went through auditioning. The vlog is assisted by a film editor who accompanies the van team. Editing is one of the greatest assets of this vlog: it provides the audience with a video-clip atmosphere, because the vlog is actually an aesthetic musical and visual compilation with short sequences of Karol’s comments.

The Polish diaspora in America constitutes one of the main topics, starting from the first 15 episodes addressing preparation of the van and the life of the Polish diaspora in Chicago. The analyses are cursory, lacking real depth, the perspective is rather typical of tourists. In addition, visual stereotypes prevail: shots from highways and urban roads in the US, shots of beautiful nature in Canada. Similarly in terms of the subject matter: the US in vloggers’ materials is shown as a country of freedom and successful businesses, full of nice, helpful people, Canada is wild but beautiful and Canadians certainly hunt for bears and fish on the ice. Polish diaspora is presented as resourceful and energetic. Of course, there are also First Nations (Lewandowski #23).⁴

4 “We are at the Center for Indian Culture in Canada. When you think about Indians, you probably associate Indians more with the US than with Canada, but the truth is that Indians are not only in the States, but also in Canada. What is more, American Indians came from Canadian Indians because this migration arrived from the north. When Europeans think about Indians, they most often imagine Pocahontas and the history of happy people, but actually the history of

Busem przez świat is not created by cultural scientists, although undoubtedly the vloggers have some aspirations. They often try to show the world through the prism of interpreting a foreign culture, although the dominant experience of traveling in their case consists in meetings with the Polish community, who helps vloggers at many stages of their journey. The authors skillfully talk about their adventures, using an aesthetic and exploratory approach, complemented by a tourist experience: visiting parks and museums, attractive cities and monuments. They build engagement through the video clip editing of beautiful handheld and drone shots, showing the vloggers on the move, a car from above (in a style reminiscent of car commercials—a vehicle in an empty landscape of majestic mountains or lakes, etc.), but also through a monologue in front of the camera. The narrator is invariably Karol, who is the face and the voice of the vlog, Ola completes the narrative with her presence, sometimes with a commentary, but stays mainly in the background.

In the episode from Wanuskewin Heritage Park, when talking about First Nations, Karol does not address his argument to experts, clearly he is not an expert either.⁵ Therefore, he does not use the term “First Nations,” but “Indians,” being completely unaware of the rejection of this term by both the subjects of the speech, Canadian society and the official state, as well as by academic discourse. However, this does not prevent him from conducting a pop-cultural version of the lecture for the interested community. At the same time, he reveals his ignorance mentioning *Pocahontas* as the main source of his knowledge. Interestingly, although he does not tell anything revelatory, he engages the viewers on a visual level as if he were unveiling a secret. He speaks straight to the camera in a slightly lowered tone, at a close-up. The text

Indians from the last few centuries is not a happy story. Firstly, when white people invaded their lands, most of them were killed, and secondly, the white took away their rights, took away their lands, which have not all been returned to them to this day. Now the Indians have many more rights, they also have benefits, they also get apartments and in general their life should be much better, but there is such a problem with them that the Indians lost the meaning of life. Indians used to live to survive, they lived to hunt animals, to have something to eat, to have a roof over their heads, to maintain a family and today, when they get a roof over their heads, when they get benefits, when they can buy food with it, they don't really know what to do. If you add alcohol problems, drug problems, it turns out that Indians are a very unhappy nation today, and a very high percentage of people in prisons are people of Indian origin, and there is a very high percentage of suicides among Indians, so, Indians today is a rather sad story.”

5 In this sense his narration is typical for the era of “Internet experts” or “YouTube experts,” in which the authority is at least questionable and the sense of the word has been devaluated.

is not prepared or memorized, at least in part it is the result of his reflections on the spot, although probably the topic of the argument, as well as the purpose of the visit to the museum were planned in advance. Even if this text has significant faults for a cultural scientist, it builds the community involvement. The comments include reflections on the White–Native American relationship or violence recorded in the history of conquering the territories of today’s United States and Canada by the colonizers. This thread, started in episode 23 from Canada, returns in episode 68 from the US, in the context of the Crazy Horse Memorial built by a Polish sculptor. It is worth noticing that this episode simultaneously presents the theme of “Indian patriotism” or struggle for cultural identity preservation (in the context of the Crazy Horse Memorial story), as well as American patriotism (in the context of Mount Rushmore and the sculptures of four US presidents), and the community in the comments combined them with Polish patriotism, although the vloggers themselves only suggested this in the title of the story (the little-known story of the Polish sculptor Korczak Ziółkowski was quoted very efficiently) (Lewandowski #68). The thread of intertwined Polish and First Nations fates also returns in the story of the Pole Staszek, who became the “white chief of an Indian tribe” (Lewandowski, “How a POLE”).

Discussions and the community involvement are very important: it is thanks to them that the vlog makes sense in terms of communication and gets funding.⁶ It is also a testimony to the skills of the senders: they are manifested both in the way they invite community members to travel and in promoting their activity through small gifts, e.g. postcards from Alaska, on the basis of mutual exchange (“comment, share, like”) (Lewandowski #24). Netnographic observations confirm that the *Busem przez świat* community, just like the vloggers, mixes mythization with demythization and remythization of White–Native American relations (“Busem przez świat,” online discussion).⁷

6 As in the case of the most popular Polish travel vlogs the funding is the mixture of Patronite crowdfunding and sponsoring, ad revenue and other incomes (selling books or gadgets, tickets for meetings and screenings).

7 Several examples of such mythization, demythization and remythization: @PawelA92: Indians vs Europeans and Aborigines vs Europeans are actually almost identical stories @hrabiakusiu: talking about the problems that Indians have, that is, that they end up in prisons, that they have problems with alcohol, that they have lost the purpose of life, etc. all of this resemble the stories about the aborigines in Australia peterkmita3383: As for the Indians...they have benefits and free medical care, but it’s only true for those who live in reservations....The Indians who live among Canadians are normal tax payers, etc.... @mattkowalski2213: Indians living in Canada have two citizenships: Canadian and American, they

**PLANETA ABSTRAKCJA: “»THEY TOOK US FROM OUR HOMES BY FORCE«”
 (MICUCH, “ARCTIC”)**

Borys and Ola Micuch, who host the *Planeta Abstrakcja* channel, are undoubtedly able to approach the topic of multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue differently. Moreover, they sometimes address difficult topics, such as the history of various ethnic conflicts, wars, prisons and forced labor camps (e.g. in Siberia) or—as in the case of the episode from the Nunavut region in Canada—difficult history of the Canadian–Inuit relationship. The vlog is more than a guidebook or a holiday footage. The travelers, as their audience notices, present their stories with anthropological passion and the skills of professional documentary filmmakers. The vlog structure frequently helps to introduce the topic: from partner conversations between the authors (both of them have a voice and interpret reality here), to Borys’ voice-over commentary accompanying shots of a given place, to interviews. Even if the interviews are partially accidental (because the authors are undoubtedly open to improvisation), they are always carefully selected and reveal new aspects of local reality, which—combined with other fragments of the video—give a mosaic image of a given place. A particular problem is often presented in a multifaceted way owing to several interlocutors. What helps here is the travelers’ undoubted talent for accosting the locals and drawing them into the conversation, as well as their openness to the unexpected (Micuch, “Arctic”).⁸

do not pay taxes and have access to schools absolutely for free. If they want to learn to fly a plane, the government gives them a possibility; they live in the north. They have flight vouchers. Flights by plane. To a medical centre, etc. @PostapokaliptyczniePRZEZSWIAT: the Indians were simply part of the ecosystem and the white man ripped them out of it like weeds ;/ we destroyed a beautiful culture” [selected by AM].

8 “We heard that when it comes to statistics here in Nunavut, the crime rate is more than 5 times higher than in other parts of Canada. Most of this crime takes place in homes. And do you feel safe here? –As a rule yes, although there are such places, which are basically meeting centers for people, I would say, with the problem of homelessness or some addictions... – They are often from such families where trauma is transmitted from generation to generation, resulting from the so-called residential schools. [off] Residential schools were boarding schools compulsory for indigenous people. The schools were run by the church and the Canadian government until the end of the 1990s. They were created to enlighten and convert the Inuit and First Nations. Children at a very young age were forcibly taken from their parents and kept at schools for many years to be indoctrinated. Sexual abuse, violence, and other forms of abuse were commonplace in residential schools, moreover, the children were starved, sometimes to death. Bodies of about 6,000 Inuit children have been discovered in mass graves. Today, a person who finished a residential school is not called a graduate,

Not only do the vloggers demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter, clearly supported by previous readings and research, but they also show sensitivity to minor linguistic differences or the ability to listen to the interviewees. The conversation of vloggers introduces the audience to the topic which is then addressed in a comment, and later elaborated on in a conversation with the protagonist of a given story, who understands the problem in depth, and their life functions as a kind of testimony. The vloggers' conversation takes place in a back-room or in the parking lot in front of the store, but the next sequence consists of shots presenting from a distance the capital of Nunavut shrouded in white snow, then in the scene accompanied by the commentary concerning the history of residential schools a symbolic graffiti (large-format colorful faces of Inuits) is shown in a pictorial layer, finally there is an interview with an Inuit woman and her story. Owing to this, the presented statistics depicting dramatic social situation in Nunavut are given a human face (the image and the narrative combine in the figure of a real human being, a representative of the history and the problem).

This type of visual narrative allows the viewers to focus on the more intellectually demanding parts of the footage (earlier and later there are less serious sequences—shopping and a ride in a sleigh on a frozen bay, where we see traditional views, endless snow-covered landscapes, sledges with Inuits drawn by huskies—they intertwine with various difficult stories throughout the episode, which is typical of this vlog). The recipients may relax at times, but in general they remain focused because their attention is not distracted by unnecessary visual or narrative elements, all sequences in some way combine to describe the difficult environment (extreme cold) and the people together with their

but a survivor. Both the Canadian government and recently Pope Francis apologized for the harm done to the First Nations. We talk about the school traumas to a member of the Nunavut Parliament, the mayor of the small town of Cambridge Bay, who also describes herself as a residential school survivor. —[interview] “A plane arrived to take the children to residential schools. And I remember when my sister and I got off the bus and she looked at me and said in our language: ‘No matter what, don’t speak our language, just say yes to them. I was lucky to have siblings with me who helped me. One of the things we lacked in the residential school was contact with our parents. We didn’t have our parents with us. When I was first taken away, I was 4 years old. We were there from August to June. When we got home, my sister said, ‘Go to Mom and Dad.’ And I said, ‘They’re not my parents.’ I was only 5 years old. Imagine what my parents felt when I said I didn’t know them. When I had my own children, I had to learn to be a parent from scratch. I couldn’t watch my parents being parents. So it’s seeping. . . The trauma of residential school survivors impacts their children and their grandchildren.”

problems. The whiteness of the landscape is not only a counterpoint to the words of the commentary and conversations or interviews with several interlocutors, it becomes a separate protagonist.

The comments of the community testify to the fact that such an approach is very appreciated by the audience, who call the bloggers real documentary filmmakers or even “the new Tony Halik and Elżbieta Dzikowska” (i.e. compare them to the most famous Polish travelers of the Polish People’s Republic and their television reports from all over the world). This proves that the American experience does not have to revolve around typical topics such as tourists’ visits to New York and Los Angeles or Yellowstone and Grand Canyon, and a vlog can provide specific knowledge about certain community or social problem, also at the level of an academic lecture or a documentary film, quoting sources and relevant research.

PLANETA ABSTRAKCJA: “»IT’S LIKE PARADISE HERE«” (MICUCH, “PARADISE”)

Similar documentary values are provided by the vloggers’ materials from Brazil. Showing the meetings with the Polish diaspora, the vloggers present here stories about the difficult history and poor living conditions of the 19th century Polish immigrants in Brazil. The vlog gives a multifaceted insight into the important cultural problem of the Polish diaspora “forgotten by country” for many years and recently “rediscovered” to Polish national consciousness.

An obvious advantage is deepening the vloggers’ and their recipients’ knowledge about the problems of the local community and its history,⁹ but it should be added that the interviews with the grandchildren of immigrants (aged 80–100) conducted for the purposes of the video have, in fact, a documentary value for the Polish culture of this region and Polish culture in general.¹⁰ Thus this American travel becomes a Grand Tour both in spatial and in temporal sense: it is performed in order to learn and to teach, to get and pass further the knowledge to the virtual community.

9 This vlog from Brazil takes on a community-forming aspect, from deepening acquaintanceship through bilateral visits (it is the second visit of the vloggers to the city of Āurea), invitation to Poland (they invite the Āurea representative to Poland to spend time with their family), to supporting the community in the efforts to build the Polish cultural center in Āurea (by crowdfunding on Patronite and participating in writing an application to Polish Ministry of Culture for financial help).

10 Vloggers also often become witnesses of history: whether it is the war in Ukraine, or the pandemic, and in the American context, Pele’s funeral or riots in Venezuela. However, not all vloggers have enough skills to use it.

In the Polish travel vlogosphere, it is the vloggers from the *Planeta Abstrakcja* and *Bez Planu* channels who most often play the role of documentary filmmakers, talking about matters important for the identity of the visited nations, sometimes risking their own health or life.¹¹ Difficult topics are of course interesting to the audience, but as a consequence they may not only bring a chance for good material, but also an unnecessary risk. *Planeta Abstrakcja* raises this issue in the last part of the footage from Brazil (presenting a story about the theft of a phone during New Year's Eve and an earlier assault with a gun, and talking about their ambivalent feelings towards different countries). The topic is triggered by the community itself by asking questions about the authors' approach to risk, about their fatigue or burnout, about the attacks and reactions to them, about the things they do not like (Micuch, "Robbed in Brazil").¹²

The footage contains colloquial, spoken language, often containing errors that the authors do not remove in editing. We get a kind of "RAW version" of the video material, which resembles anthropological "notes from the field." There are frequent conversations between the vloggers about a given topic, interviews with people on the street, both with friends and strangers. However, the topic is always well-thought-out and well-documented, initial observations and textbook information provided in the form of commentary are deepened owing to conversations with the inhabitants of the visited areas, their opinions are equivalent to the opinions of the vloggers, it is a kind of polyphony

11 This generalization is based on the observation for many years of multiple vlog channels of Polish travelers who from time to time, sometimes provoked by their public, talk about their health problems or problems with security in various destinations. The most prominent examples here include *Bez Planu*, *Globstory*, *Planeta Abstrakcja*.

12 "We wanted to base this material on one question you asked us: have you ever had enough of a place, a country, or was a specific trip unsuccessful? –We were thinking a little about the answer, and we actually discovered that basically every trip we made was both successful and unsuccessful, we have never visited a country that we totally hated, everywhere we go we find some of our pros and cons. And when you watched our previous material from Brazil, you probably realized that we talked about things that we just like in this country, but there are also a lot of things that we really hate in Brazil, and I think we didn't mention them too much, so we'll talk about them a little bit today, and this station is the perfect place for that, because traveling around Brazil is one of those things that we don't like very much. (...) Q: Don't you ever experience burnout or some kind of pressure to make movies? A: I think we don't, because we kind of... each movie is a little different and we come up with different topics: whether it's sexuality in Brazil or the topic of education in Madagascar, as if... it's interesting to us and we don't feel burnout because of this."

and not a tourist impression. Charitable campaigns are also frequent, the vloggers engage in various activities (Maj, “Communicate”).¹³

The comments of the virtual community (or the vloggers’ audience) testify to the appreciation of not only the videos, but also the vloggers’ idea of Grand Tour and lifestyle, to a certain community of values and approach to the world characterizing this community. Emotions related to their approach to risk, difficult social topics and intercultural relations, wars and conflicts are also revealed here—addressing these topics evokes respect among the community, which eagerly engages in aid campaigns. The vloggers simply have a loyal group of fans. At the same time, despite the professional approach and predilection for difficult topics, the vlog contains an interesting set of documentaries from the world and good entertainment. The community interacts much more often than in the case of other analyzed vlogs—not only with the broadcasters, but also with other members. Discussions are often multithreaded, most posts are commented on, the community tends to engage in long—and often cognitively valuable—polemics. Discussions, moreover, are engaging, revealing the audience’s broad knowledge of other travel vloggers and their critical assessment (in terms of self-presentation, value of materials, travel style) (“Planeta Abstrakcja,” online discussion).¹⁴

The recipients appreciate the professionalism, both in the approach to the subject in terms of filming and editing, but also in financial transparency towards the patrons¹⁵. Owing to the serious approach to their patrons and thoughtful selection of sponsors, the travelers

13 They are the initiators of, among others, over 200 virtual adoptions of children in Madagascar in order to support their education; they raised over PLN 1.5 million from their followers to help Ukraine; etc. These examples show the constant and strong support of the virtual community for the vloggers, who are recognized as ethic influencers and virtual authorities.

14 “@pucusiek87: I love you, I watch everything you share, you have interesting footage and you talk very matter-of-factly about the countries, places, cities you visit, it’s really great to watch. Do not worry about negative comments, they are posted by people who envy you, but do not realize how much work it requires from you. Thanks to you, many people can “see” a bit of the world, learn something interesting about other countries, in addition, you are very committed to helping others. No one has the right to accuse you of incompetence or greed, this is a slur. I hope that the accommodation issue will be resolved quickly and we can soon watch your new videos. Keep on creating, many people are cheering for you, all the best and see you @bartuszo: Exactly! Faza, cash, podróże wojownika.... I stopped watching as they have been only whining, only Planeta Abstrakcja can still be watched.”

15 This means that in final episodes of particular travels the vloggers present the total costs of their excursion to the patrons who support them on Patronite.

do not need to be afraid that the community will turn away from them (Feng et al., Magno & Cassia 288–290). The professionalism concerns yet another sphere: the ability to use local languages. Almost everywhere Boris learns the local language enough to conduct conversations, and Ola supports him in this during their American travel. This is a unique phenomenon in the Polish travel vlogosphere, where travelers speak mainly English and thus significantly narrow their cognitive horizon.

BEZ PLANU: "HELL & PARADISE"

Bez Planu is Bartek Czukiewski's travel vlog that portrays his trips to South America and Mesoamerica. The most interesting materials concern Venezuela, where the vlogger spent several years of his life. What is important, the author is fluent in Spanish and English. On the one hand, he presents himself as a narrator-macho, who talks about exotic beaches, exotic trips and his exotic girlfriends, but it is certainly not a vlog with typically tourist content, because visually and thematically it combines this sensorially attractive exoticism with socially important topics, not avoiding economic issues or observations of a journalistic or even reportorial nature. One of the assets of this vlog is the vlogger's almost "radio" deep voice commenting on the images from the field.

The episode "Hell & Paradise" addresses the paradoxes of Venezuela, where scenes from Caracas are accompanied by a story about protests against President Maduro, about widespread poverty in a country where the average salary is \$4, and about hunger (the viewers can see people standing in endless queues for bread). This narrative is juxtaposed by way of contrast with another scene, which is a story about the tourist paradise of the Los Roques islands intended for the rich, located only 40 km away from Caracas, where you can only arrive by plane for the price of \$250 and where prices are European. The narrative uses contrasts in the visual layer (shots from a drone in Los Roques show a sandy white beach and azure sea and the vlogger's Venezuelan friend in a swimsuit, depicted in a style of travel agency ads, scenes from Caracas show the dramas of everyday life, poverty, social unrest, protests, queues, robberies, the scenes are partly shot from a moving car, partly out of hiding, indicating the vlogger's participation in protests together with a group of journalists). The commentary is also based on contrasts, but here the vlogger uses other means: he presents a large amount of data reflecting the realities of life of various layers of society, he juxtaposes prices and earnings of protesting Venezuelans

and prices for tourists, he describes in detail the difficulties of everyday life by showing protesters and their arguments when allowing them to speak to the camera (Czukiewski, "Hell & Paradise").

An earlier episode, "Venezuela. Chaos, Protests" was filmed entirely in Caracas during street fights, which were shown in close-ups and confirmed the vlogger's participation as a media observer in the protests against Maduro (Czukiewski, "Venezuela. Chaos"). It is an eight-and-a-half-minute documentary of street fights, social unrest and dangers, the army shooting at crowds, protesters and their fights with the soldiers. The footage includes numerous observations of peaceful moments accompanied by a commentary allowing to understand the presented scenes and the reasons why people took to the streets, a description of spatial relations between the fighting sides, the audience can see starvation portions of food and primitive weapons of the demonstrators as well as armed military convoys. However, this is not all: there are also dynamic scenes of escape from an army attack, chaotic images of fleeing in fear, testimonies of shots, calls for help directed to the world. Such materials about Venezuela were not provided at that time by global mass media, they could only be shown by independent war correspondents and vloggers (who in fact become independent journalists and war correspondents). Christopher Booker suggested once that "those who tell stories, rule the world" (Burgess & Green 186), and some vloggers prove this sentence to be true.

This documentary feature characterizes the *Bez Planu* channel, and the lack of attachment to the aesthetic values of the shots (mainly handheld shots, frequent traveling, hidden shots) corresponds to the assumed non-fiction nature of the narrative. A strong advantage of the channel is the economic and social analysis, as well as the choice of less popular destinations that are undervalued by the mainstream media. The planned chaos fits into the poetics of the *Bez Planu* channel, which is appreciated for this "harshness" and realism of the material, as evidenced by the reactions of the community ("Bez Planu," online discussion).

CONCLUSIONS

The American Grand Tour of contemporary vloggers is a multi-threaded and multi-layered topic. Each video is always a choice, and the aesthetics as well as approaches of the vloggers are definitely very diverse. My observations prove the constant contact of the vloggers with virtual communities that follow them as well as the use of many attention-engaging techniques and conscious application of the film

language. In conclusion it can be stated that leisure, cultural myths and crisis management constitute three permanent aspects of travel narratives, which are implemented by the vloggers in an individual way.

Leisure. Vloggers address the issue of travels in reference to leisure and work differently. For Czukiewski, relaxation means resting on an exotic beach, for the travelers from *Planeta Abstrakcja* it is a journey to places which are dirty, dangerous or considered the “worst in the world,” such as Norilsk in Siberia or Nunavut in Canada. Owing to this, the offer of vlogs is diversified, and the audience know what to expect. Therefore, one can look at it as a kind of genre-related identification of vlogs or a creative strategy. On the other hand, this corresponds to the natural different ways or styles of traveling represented by the vloggers.

Cultural myths. This is the most difficult topic for the vloggers, which is at the same time very tempting, and although everyone promises a meeting of cultures, a clash with strangeness and demythization, they often mythicize the places they visit themselves as their narratives tend to be a kind of mythographic creation. It is not demythization but creation of myths, or rather re-mythization, that is their characteristic feature. America(s) seem(s) to be (a) perfect object(s) for this. The American Grand Tour of a vlogger thus becomes a story about the hardships of traveling and brave protagonists, whereas historical knowledge at the high school level or geographical and cultural knowledge at the level of a tourist guidebook are presented here as a revelation of mystery.

Crisis management. The vloggers often deal with external crises, typical of a long expedition, of traveling by a specific means of transport (e.g. constant repairs of the car). Sometimes these difficulties result from cultural differences and problems with communication or mobility, sometimes from a long distance to urban centers, sometimes they are associated with climate disasters. However, there are also difficulties of a different kind: interacting with other cultures is not always easy, and people met on the way are not always friendly, the vloggers' equipment can be an easy prey for thieves, etc. Hence the stories of how the vloggers were attacked or robbed (e.g. *Planeta Abstrakcja*), and sometimes about the fact that someone was aiming weapons at them (e.g. *Bez Planu, Planeta Abstrakcja*). On the other hand, psychological crises related to constant traveling, changing places and choosing such a lifestyle instead of a settled family life are also discussed in the vlog entries. The vloggers deal with them differently, sometimes relaxing between trips or going on vacation without a camera (*Busem przez świat*), sometimes taking longer breaks to reappear with a new crew

(*Bez Planu, Busem przez świat*) or talking about burnout (*Globstory, Bez Planu*). The latter may also be caused by an external situation (wars, conflicts, protests and riots, disasters, pandemic).

The important problems that accompany travel narratives thus include topics of biggest significance to the audience: both the boredom of everyday life (even an exotic one) and all possible crises that a person can experience, regardless of the place of residence or the represented culture. These are problems of any engaging media message, not only of the vlogosphere. And the vloggers help their communities interpret the world to the best of their abilities.

Translated by Justyna Kucharska

Abstract: The article concerns travel narratives of Polish video bloggers (or vloggers) who treat a journey through the Americas as a contemporary Grand Tour. Video blogs and their visual storytelling are becoming tools for describing the world in the digital era. In this context, the Americas take on the meaning of a world that is simultaneously close and distant. Traveling on both continents of the other hemisphere is characterized by a double clash of civilizations and a confrontation with one's imagination created on the basis of encounters with the media and culture of the Americas. It is also a clash with the myth of America and, at the same time, a story about the role of a vlogger as a narrator consolidating their audience and the network community in the act of looking beyond the horizon and behind the scenes of "real America." The research will use the analysis of the content of audiovisual material from selected YouTube travel channels and elements of netnographic analysis of virtual communities gathered around the best Polish travel vlogs.

Keywords: Grand Tour, travel vlogs, online narratives, storytelling, cultural myths, American journeys, Polish vlogosphere

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