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Jean Tinguely & Le Corbusier in Swiss Weekly Film Newsreels and Television

Medial Rhetorics—Medial Discourses

KORNELIA IMESCH

Ever since the first screening on 1 August, 1940, the nation's birthday, of SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS SWN [SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU SFW], a newsreel meant as a "camera against Hitler and fascism" (cf. Ladame 1997), art and culture have played a decisive, and often commercially relevant, role in the constitution of national identity in the framework of "Spiritual Defense" geared towards "conservation as well as promotion of culture" [Kulturwahrung und Kulturwerbung] (cf. Etter 1937).¹ As a rule, the significance of economized esthetics and cultural production has been closely accompanied by technological and scientific progress and innovation. In the broadcasts analyzed for this research, this has resulted in a functional understanding of art. For example, in a report from 13 December 1968 (no. 1339.1/2), the "good form" of the artist Max Bill (Erni 1983) was

1 On this question in the context of the Swiss weekly film newsreels cf. the NSF-project of Sigrid Schade, ICS/ZHdK, and Kornelia Imesch, UNIL, mentioned in the Introduction of this book. For the Swiss newsreels in general cf. the Introduction and cp.: Gasser 1978/79: 3-67; Fränkel 2003; Sutter 2000; Imesch/Lutz/Lüscher 2011. For the concept of the Spiritual Defense conceived by Philipp Etter (1937) cf. Bretscher-Spindler 1997: 10-12; Amrein 2007: 105-123; Ladame 1997.

presented as an analogy to the “good form” of highway construction (see Figs. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1 & 2: Kunsthaus Zurich, Exhibition Max Bill, SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU, no. 1339.2, 13 December 1968 (left); Highway N1, Zurich-Winterthur, SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU, no. 1339.1, 13 December 1968. (right).



Sources: MEMORIAV

This is not the sole instance of analogization through the use of a symbolical montage that has become an integral part of the Swiss “grand récit” of the functionality of beauty and the beauty of functionality (cf. Imesch 2010: 141-156). A further twist of this analogization is inherent to the construction of highways, which was inspired by the visions of legendary designer Norman Bel Geddes in his spectacular *Futurama* presented at the General Motors pavilion of the World Exhibition in New York in 1939.² Thus, the large-scale American vision can be seen as having been translated into a small Swiss reality (see Figs. 3 and 4) in a newsreel report from 4 October 1963 (no 1083.3) whose audiovisual reflection, up to the early 1950s, was monopolized to a large degree by SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS.

Starting in 1953, however, this monopoly of the audiovisual sector in Switzerland was undermined by the introduction of public television (cf. Mäusli 2012), whose filmic style and news-broadcasting soon rivaled that of the newsreels. This rivalry culminated in a cessation of the older medium in 1975—despite repeated attempts to reform the newsreel from 1970 on-

2 For the *Futurama* and the highways in general cf. Albrecht/Bel Geddes 2012; Smith Wergeland 2013; for the highways in Switzerland cf. Heller/Volk 1999.

wards under the new chief editor Hermann Wetter (1970-1973) and Peter R. Gerdes (1973-1975). These reforms even included experiments with the “magazine-like” style of television, often realized during this time by young Swiss film directors (cf. Schärer/Sutter 2000: 10-11). This essay will explore the full extent of the aforesaid medial rupture, which was much more than a mere technical change based on scientific innovation.

Fig. 3 & 4: Norman Bel Geddes, Futurama, General Motors pavilion, World Exhibition, New York 1939, detail (left); Mensch und Planung, SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU, no. 1083.3, 4 October 1963 (right).



Sources: Archive of the Author (left), MEMORIAV (right).

SPIRITUAL DEFENSE, NATION OF WILL AND THE MEDIUM’S RHETORICS

SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS, which were conceived as a “Biopic” of Switzerland (cf. Imesch 2011: 227-230), conjured the already mentioned functionality as an almost Aristotelian esthetic ethics, or an ethical esthetics. According to Charles Cantieni, the chief editor in 1963, this sensibly lay midway between what he called the (still) flashy German weekly newsreels, the DEUTSCHE WOCHENSCHAU, and the (far too) veristic Italian weekly newsreels INCOM (cf. Cantieni 1963: 135-136).³ Therefore, regarding

3 Before Charles Cantieni who was chief-editor of the Swiss Weekly Newsreels between 1 September 1961 and 31 December 1966, his predecessors were Paul

rhetoric, they opted in line with the Swiss conceptually non-hierarchical, median, conception as “Nation of Will” (Ernest Renan)]—for a “median style” and presented themselves—so Cantieni again—as a “filmed newspaper” that understood itself to be a “mirror” of the country (cf. Cantieni 1963: 137, 138).⁴ In the words of the then operator Franz Vlasak, this “mirror of the country” in service of the “Invention of Switzerland” (cf. *Die Erfindung der Schweiz* 1998) functioned along the lines of the concept of filmic hybridization built on the so-called reconstructed authenticity (cf. Vlasak 1956) and a combination of the genres of documentary and feature film which make the newsreel medium so genuinely distinctive.⁵ This was accompanied by commentaries—preserved by MEMORIAV, Berne, in the three national languages of Switzerland—that, as a rule, are characterized by an impetus towards morality and educating the masses which was—in the Swiss context—completely in line with the medium’s function and message as a medial product of the aforementioned “Spiritual Defense”. However, quite often this impetus was somewhat weaker in French and Italian versions and commentaries than in German ones. In the 1950s and 1960s, the educational impetus inherent to German versions was, as in the first years after 1945 in German Newsreels, emphasized through the voice-over—which, in terms of tonality and austerity, did not differ much from the voice-over in war times. The patronizing, moralistic tone and impetus were further accentuated by the signet of the SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU.

Regarding topics in art and culture which could be presented in the desired style—and here I am speaking about the period between the 1940s and the early 1960s—SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS constitute an impressive audiovisual medium. The Swiss appropriation of the newsreel medium is based on an intriguing mix of characteristics of newsreels aimed at up-to-dateness, sensationalism and commercialization, and Swiss pragma-

Alexis Ladame (1.8.1940-15.10.1944) and Hans Laemmel (15.8.1944-31.8.1961). Cf. Schärer/Sutter 2000: 1-10.

4 For the rhetorical styles cf. Göttert 1991.

5 Franz Vlasak in the *Seeländer Volkszeitung*, Biel, 6 Januar 1956: “Die Wirklichkeit braucht Regie. Es passiert viel in unserem Lande, aber selbstverständlich nicht immer, wenn wir dabei sind, oder in einer Form, die sich für Aufnahmen eignet. Das ist der Grund, dass 60 bis 70% unserer Aufnahmen rekonstruiert gefilmt werden müssen.” Vlasak quoted after Schärer/Sutter 2000: 8.

tism—resulting, in all aspects, in a typically Swiss de-emphasis of anything too spectacular.

But who were the artists that most caught the attention of the newsreel producers? What was the applied style of presenting art-related topics in newsreel productions for which, over many years, an unchanging editorial staff and film crew was responsible? And how did television present the same or similar topics in daily news shows or local news reports? What was the line of argument of each medium expressed in visuals or “film language”, content, or commentaries?

These questions, which were one of the principal topics of the aforementioned research project,⁶ are here tackled by looking at reports about the artist Jean Tinguely, born in 1925, and the architect Le Corbusier, born in 1887.

LE CORBUSIER AND JEAN TINGUELY IN SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS AND IN TELEVISION

What united the much younger Tinguely and the older Le Corbusier was that although being born in Switzerland, they both had great careers abroad. Furthermore, from an early age, they each made conscious use of media images—both in the form of photography and film (cf. Hahnloser 1999; Herschdorfer/Umstätter 2012; Hultén 1988)—for promoting their careers, building up their images, and their personal brands (see Figs. 5 and 6). They were also both their own theorists, especially Le Corbusier (cf. Benton 2007). The latter, an especially active promoter of the self, the “I”, even strived, by choosing his own photographers, for near total control of his

6 Cf. Note 1. These questions cannot be in the foreground of this essay. Summarily answered, the research results proved that several of the most visible artists in Swiss art history like Max Bill, Hans Erni or Jean Tinguely are also treated in different reports of the Swiss Weekly Newsreels and gained in this audiovisual medium a great importance. Beside this we have a great number of male artists again which are treated in reports that are not or only little known today which shows us a second or different “History” of Swiss Art History. Not much importance was granted to architects and even less to curators who are known today, like Arnold Rüdinger or Harald Szeemann.

private and public image. Both artists thus demonstrated awareness of the power of contemporary mass media in deciding what entered social discourses and what entered the collective cultural memory.

Figs. 5 & 6: Le Corbusier in front of a plan of the Cité radieuse, 1930s (left); Jean Tinguely with his Méta-matic no. 12 in Paris, 1959 (right).



Sources: Archive of the Author (left), Robert Doisneau, photographer (right).

With the benefit of hindsight, however, their conscious use of these media did not always turned out in their favor, such as Le Corbusier's failed interview with the TAGESSCHAU of SWISS TELEVISION on 5 November 1961.

In addition to their worldwide fame, these artists' work shares an 'up-to-dateness' recognized by both the newsreel medium and television, which served to promote the image of Switzerland abroad. However, both media started to report on these artists at a rather late point in their careers. This is partly due to the fact that at that time, Tinguely and Le Corbusier mostly worked abroad—Le Corbusier even taking French citizenship. I will first concentrate on reports about Le Corbusier.

Le Corbusier's functional, rational, and eventually expressive understanding of architecture (cf. Cohen 2013) was well suited to the so-called

“grand récit” of Switzerland as an esthetic-ethical construct informed by a functional esthetics. This “grand récit” combined innovation in engineering and construction with great novelty in architectural and artistic conceptualizations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the last house designed by Le Corbusier, the *Centre Le Corbusier* in Zurich, got full coverage by both newsreel and television (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Le Corbusier, Centre Le Corbusier, Zurich, 1967.



Source: Archive of the author

In a number of broadcasts between 1957 and 1971, both media reported on Le Corbusier, who died in 1965, regarding his work in the fields of architecture, painting, and urban design in rather general terms. In addition, there are many reports exclusively focusing on the posthumously (1967) inaugurated *Centre* in Zurich. The German-speaking television station reported on it in five separate broadcasts in the *TAGESSCHAU* and in three contributions of a local news magazine. The four reports by the newsreel medium resemble their television counterparts regarding some aspects of their style or contents. In this article, I take a closer look at newsreel number 1280 from 22 October 1967 that reports on the construction of the Zurich Corbusier Center, newsreel number 1177 from 3 September 1965 about the archi-

tect's passing away, as well as the TAGESSCHAU report from 28 August 1965 and the local news report from 25 May 1966 about, again, the *Centre Le Corbusier* in Zurich.

All of these broadcasts honor the international reputation of the architect and even characterize him as “a prophet not heard in his own country”. They also single out the novelty of his last building, which was based on the principle of pre-fabricated, modular construction that featured a self-supporting roof which was, in terms of statics, completely separate from the rest of the building. As these constructional innovations are a continuation of techniques found in Switzerland in the construction of multi-level buildings before the 1960s, they receive similar treatment in newsreel and television reports. Interestingly, this pre-fabricated, modular style of construction was, in the same period, often explained to the public in analogy to innovations in highway construction, another domain of special importance for the Swiss *grand narrative* of this period (cf. Imesch 2010). Notably, the TAGESSCHAU was able to react to the architect's death a week earlier than the newsreel medium. This demonstrates one of the newer medium's greatest advantages: its up-to-dateness. In addition, television was able to adopt filmed material from newsreels, filmed in 35mm—whereas reversed borrowing was impossible due to television's formatting in 16mm.

By comparing newsreel clips from 1966 to further broadcasts of the TAGESSCHAU or the local news magazine by the German-speaking television station at the occasion of the inauguration of the *Centre Le Corbusier* in Zurich in 1967, remarkable differences regarding filmic and journalistic strategies become apparent. Let us look at the media's differing treatment of polemics circulating in Zurich around the building's construction. One of the most prominent polemical instances is a gender issue revolving around the female owner of the building: Heidi Weber, owner of a gallery and vendor of design furniture “dared” to set the final stepping stone into the architectural legacy of Le Corbusier, an architect treated as a god in the international architecture scene. While the newsreel report lightly maneuvers around the polemics related to this case, the television report directly tackles the polemics and tries to address possible reasons for it—an endeavor supported by filmed material from various angles. Whereas the newsreel uses commentaries from the off, television combines off-commentary with interviews in which Heidi Weber explains her motives at great lengths. This is in keeping with television's desire to deliver background information and

to ascribe authenticity to the report by incorporating comments from the people directly involved. Finally, the television reporting style differs from that of newsreels in a greater use of different camera perspectives, representing symbolically different points of view, and in length. For example, the broadcast of the local news magazine about the *Centre Le Corbusier* from 1971 is three times as long as the equivalent newsreels clip, which was three minutes long.

The different approaches to filmic and journalistic presentation found in newsreels and television become even more apparent in clips about Jean Tinguely and his anti-constructive, anti-functional oeuvre. Importantly, Tinguely's kinetic and interactive machines introduced fun into the hallowed halls of museums (cf. Fuchs 2012: 210-243; Imesch 2015: 227-243). His noisy, rusty, and function-less machines and objects put an end to the esthetic ethics and the ethical esthetics of the Swiss "grand récit". His objects, with which the viewing public was invited to interact, undermined the cultivated etiquette to which visitors to art museums ever since the 19th century had been trained: keep quiet, do not touch, just contemplate (cf. Bennett 1995). The "Jack-of-all-trades", who in Paris of the late 1950s became famous overnight, already around 1960 and shortly thereafter achieved international fame due to his happenings and art objects: in the patio of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in the Nevada desert, in the boulevards of Paris, in the piazza in front of the Dome in Milan or in the sky over Düsseldorf, in Japan as well as in Switzerland, in museums just as in art galleries, and finally at the national exhibition in Lausanne—the Expo 64—with his machine sculpture *Heureka* (cf. Imesch 2014: 257-269).

1960 marks the beginning of an eight-report broadcasting spree about Tinguely in the SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU. The last of these reports was produced in 1972, under Hermann Wetter who, as already mentioned, took over Charles Cantieni's position in the beginning of 1970. From roughly the same time until 1981, the German-speaking Swiss television station produced a total of eleven reports focusing on Tinguely—in the programs TAGESSCHAU, BLICKPUNKT, and the local news magazine, the REGIONALMAGAZIN, all of them more or less beneficiaries and new medial versions of the SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU reports.

As mentioned before, coverage of Tinguely further highlights the differences in filmic and journalistic strategies of the two mass media: the reports in the BLICKPUNKT or REGIONALMAGAZIN of the Swiss-German tele-

vision station again differ from the WOCHENSCHAU reports in terms of their longer running time, which allowed for a more thorough presentation. Tinguely is introduced in the television reports as an exponent of an alternative Swiss art scene that sets new challenges for audiences. By means of a varied cinematography, spectators are introduced to his works, accompanied by off-voice commentaries as well as explanatory clips from interviews—which, however, never attempt to provide critical guidance for judging the visuals. Mostly, the tone is kept neutral. The filmic, journalistic style tries to be documentary or attempts to almost philosophically interrogate this weird machine art.

The journalistic approach of the SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU report about Tinguely differs from the television reports in another sense—which, of course, can be explained in part by the characteristics of the genre and its specific conditions for production and distribution. The coverage oscillates between, on the one hand, an understanding of art as a socially relevant instrument for education—in the sense of a traditional documentary format which Hans Cürli in the 1920s coined the term “Hands that create” (Kreimeier et al. 2005). On the other hand, the coverage is informed by an interpretational move inherent to the newsreel genre that equates non-understanding with non-sense. In keeping with this understanding, an early report from 1960 first opts for an ironically bent interpretation and social localization of these novel objects. Commentaries from the off state that this Swiss artist “mocks the deadly seriousness of the machine age”. Even though the works, in the mentioned reports from 1960, no. 937, and 1972, no. 1497, are presented in great detail with the help of varied panorama shots and close ups, as well as labels such as “senseless, ugly machines” in combination with cinematographic staging which places them in a context of carnival, turbulence, and noise. Perhaps not surprisingly, the audience in the aforementioned report of 25 February 1972 mainly consists of children and women unconcerned with male modes of devotion (see Fig. 8).

The same report accentuates the depreciation and negative interpretation of both this art and its audience by staging the report in slapstick manner. This reading is likewise supported by the title of the report “Leerlauf plus Schrott = Erfolg”—which translates into “Tickover plus junk equals success”. This mode of critiquing and staging of then contemporary art is replicated in a report of 1971 regarding the newly founded art fair “Art Basel”.

Fig. 8: Exhibition Jean Tinguely, Kunsthalle Basel, SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU, no. 1497, 25 February 1972.



Source: MEMORIAV

MEDIAL DISCOURSES—MEDIAL IDEOLOGIES

The audiovisual mediums and especially the new medium television, grown out of a post-war-society, had, as the up-to-date media, complex consequences for discursive argumentation and form. They thus constituted the socio-political discourses (cf. Sieber 2014), its changed dialectics and underlying ideologies; and this also and in manifold ways remains the case in the field of art reports today (cf. Borer 2013).

While the SCHWEIZER FILMWOCHENSCHAU, produced normally in black and white, can partly be seen as the product and the medial defender of a teleological, sacralized mono causal state dialogue, the new and younger medium of television, first produced in black and white, was after 1968 produced in the visually attractive and vivid format of color, marked a changed discursive manner of audiovisual transmission of information and their inherent ideologies. This medial change was intimately linked to different dispositional knowledge presentation due to or as a consequence of deep social changes in the Swiss and Western societies of the 1950s, 1960s

and 1970s,⁷ thereby anticipating and preparing for changes in the political system which were—in Switzerland—recognizable only after the crisis of the Swiss state at the end of the 20th century in the context of the so-called “Token Affairs”, the Swiss state crisis of the end of the 1990s. Media changes are therefore understandable and prolific in their potential as “media caesura” (“Zäsur der Medien”, [cf. Tholen 2002]), and as part of a complex negotiating and emerging of newly becoming communities.

Other aspects point in the same direction in the context of the SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS which—as newsreels worldwide—in the postwar period began to lose their importance as a medium of information and entertainment. This becomes understandable through another truism, that media only continue to exist if their discursive and audiovisual characteristics keep adapting to social and ideological changes. The conceptualization of the SWISS WEEKLY FILM NEWSREELS as a medium that “mirrors” a Switzerland shaped by myths (Marchal 2007) and modernist stereotypes of functionality and rationality, in absence of problems and ruptures, finally proves to be a medial “dinosaur” that capitulates when faced with more recent artistic and social developments which occurred in the Helvetic art and architectural field since the 1960s.

This can also be seen in a report on the last day of the 1964 Expo. In this report, Tinguely’s machine sculpture *Heureka* (see Fig. 9) one of the main attractions of the national exhibition in Lausanne, is interpreted as either “a nuisance or a joke”. Despite calling *Heureka* an “unmasking machine”, thereby acknowledging its successful challenge of the exhibition’s main ideology of “good form”, the report’s positive commentary gets immediately neutralized. The camera hectically moves away from *Heureka* and focuses on the monorail, then on the military pavilion of the architect Jan Both, standing for a well-fortified country, and finally on the “Path of Switzerland”, all of them exemplifying the “good form” at the basis of this Expo and of the construct of a Switzerland ruled by order and rationality. The report’s commentary remains therefore seemingly oblivious that this national exhibition in Lausanne is at the same time a swan song of exactly such a myth. Instead, the filmic montage places Tinguely’s machine sculp-

7 For this changes in the Swiss society cf. also Imhof/Kleger/Romano 1996; Linke/Tanner 2006.

ture near the rollercoaster and hence reinforces an association between the two.

Fig. 9: Jean Tinguely, Heureka, National Exhibition Expo 64, Lausanne.



Source: MEMORIAV

Thus, despite the report's initial praise of the unusual work, the gigantic rusty monolith is ultimately interpreted as being pure tickover. However, what literally *did* tick over was the Swiss weekly film newsreel, whose production ceased in 1975. Government-funded reporting on art and culture was now exclusively handed over to television.

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