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Re-marking of Differences: Culture Television and Art Interplaying

Variability of Cultural Magazines and their
Heterogeneous Dispositions

NADJA BORER

Media act as regimes of knowledge and truth, mediating what “world” or “culture” is or should be. In this sense, television broadcasts and televisual cultural magazines in particular are often considered transparent sources of daily events. From the perspective of media studies, however, cultural television as a medium acts not primarily as a transparent window on the world, but as a mirror, as a multilayered and ongoing historically variable projection screen (cf. Lacan 1998; Silverman 1996).

Cultural magazines provide televisually framed segments of information and entertainment, re-presenting sections and fragments of the cultural reality. Like the “bard” who, according to Fiske and Hartley (2003), continually interprets the socio-cultural activities and collects, re-combines, and processes the fundamental myths of a society into extensive mythologies, cultural magazines constitute and construct culture by selecting and presenting it.

The televisual regimes of gaze in cultural magazines are always historically variable and underlie specific patterns of representation. It is primarily due to the multidimensionality of audiovisual communication and the continually rendering problematic of its own *dispositif* (Foucault 1977) that television operates as a complementary medium of socio-cultural modernization processes (Hickethier 1994). Especially because of television’s “con-

stitutive heterogeneity” (Weber 1996: 110), we are facing a constant renewal and reformulation of familiar perception aesthetics of televisual discourse. The intermedial exchange between television and other media demonstrates a curious oscillation between simple re-production and innovative re-configuration of the visible and articulable.

Since their inception, public service broadcasts in German-speaking Europe have been subject to a prescribed public task that includes a ‘cultural assignment’. This assignment has always been broadly formulated and does not provide specific details for its realization. However, in the last decades it has been exposed to fundamental transformations and caesura with the introduction of the dual broadcasting system in 1984. The program formats and contents of the public service broadcasters thereafter must be—according to their own description—factual and informative, primarily to distinguish their broadcasts from the commercial offerings of private channels. The increasing economization of the medium motivated public service television to accentuate its main focus on information and culture.

Conceived as a sort of mediating authority for culture, televisual cultural magazines mainly cover contemporary popular cultural events in Europe. From the perspective of media aesthetics, however, the surface of the television picture itself becomes a space of re-visualized media and arts (cf. Casetti/Odin 1990; Eco 1984). Therefore, cultural magazines follow journalistic principles when approaching themes of innovatory value and allow, for instance, for a television-suitable personalization. However, the peculiarities of the heterogenous medium call for more detailed and carefully considered reflection: *we must put the collective forms of perceptions in a society up for negotiation*. The analysis of television therefore enables insight into the conditioning of specific views and the patterns of perception.

Consequently, I am considering cultural magazines as an epochally complex format in which the shifting variability of mediated pictures and reality is exposed. Televisual magazine reports establish a varying tension between a detached indifference to other media and arts, which in the context of re-visualization are appropriated, and an innovative *marking of difference*—in the deconstructive sense of *différance* (Derrida 1984)—of televisual possibilities. In order to examine the televisual mediation of culture and its re-staging of arts with regard to the interplay of different notions of image, I would first like to discuss interferences of television and culture. How are magazines structured, which cultural assumptions do they incorpo-

rate, and in which discursive formations do they articulate culture? To what extent does the broadcasting format promote an appropriately complex and ambivalent view of their cultural settings, and how are audiences' modes of perceiving these television programs literally "programmed"? In a further step, I would like to analyze aspects of the aesthetics of television, since—as Roland Barthes (2005) has shown convincingly for the medium of photography—televsual aesthetics participate substantially in the connotation of the staged and presented artifacts.

Studies concerning television in the 1980s (i.e. Caldwell 1995) underline that the medium mainly mediates re-visualizations; pictures or media integrated into different daily practices by means of re-presentation obtain a completely different visibility and function. This shows that television positions itself less according to its picture of the world, than its continuous processing and differentiation of internal and external pictorial forms. Discussing selected magazine reports I will therefore, in a final step, articulate how television deals with artworks and analyze how the transformation of pictures into screen images enables a reflection on different notions of the category of the image.

TRANSLATION PROCESSES BETWEEN TELEVISION AND CULTURE

As a media format, cultural magazines are always part of technical, socio-cultural and aesthetic frames. In order to describe their specific ways of presenting and re-presenting culture and art, the interdependencies of culture and television have to be analyzed. Cultural magazines are both products of a televsual *dispositif* and intermediaries for cultural practices, discourses and regimes of the gaze. Already in the mid-1960s, the German-speaking television broadcasters had been increasingly addressing the category entitled "culture" and reported at regular intervals on what they considered to be current cultural events.

In this initial phase, culture had been mediated mostly in televsual magazines, which are a mixture of feature stories and newscast. Seen from a media-historical point of view, the genealogy of the format can be traced to the very early stages of the US commercial television where the format had developed in the context of product advertising. Pat Weaver's maga-

zine plan, for example, focuses in particular on the commercial blocks, which were framed by the rest of the program (cf. Schumacher 1994).

The fragmentation of television programs allowed for promotion of the typical, additive structure of the magazines (cf. Hickethier 1988). While the cultural assignment had initially been limited to literature, art and theatre, the field of music was soon incorporated. Over time, the concept of culture portrayed through television was extended even further. For instance Reinhard Hoffmeister, former chief editor and moderator of the cultural magazine ASPEKTE for the Second German Television Channel (ZDF), described the understanding of culture in 1973 quite paradigmatically: “In our times culture doesn’t mean solely literature and fine arts [...] especially that, what gets under the skin belongs nowadays to culture: housing, leisure time, the environment. Not an elite minority but all people should be addressed by ASPEKTE” (Hoffmeister 1973, quoted in: Schumacher 1994: 148, translated by the author).

Expressed even before the beginning of the competition in the context of dual broadcasting, this extended understanding of culture indicates a tendency towards entertaining programming. The introduction of private broadcasters from the mid-1980s onwards led to “culture” being conceived of as a distinct part of the overall programming. From this, the public service broadcasters hoped to secure further funding and ensure their continued existence. In 1984, the director of the Second German Television channel (ZDF) Dieter Stolte emphasized: “The social responsibility of television extends to the production of culture. The contribution of television to the entire culture is not insignificant. Television is itself a part of culture, which has won its place with original artwork and music” (Stolte 1984, quoted in: Von Hagen 1985: 112, translated by the author).

The media caesura in the 1990s transformed the meaning of television as a cultural tool into an audience-oriented service provider. Public service broadcasters still had to comply with their cultural provision while remaining economically competitive, a fact which is reflected in the ongoing modification and renewal of the corporate design and the studio architecture of cultural magazines. For example, until 2010, the cultural magazine KULTURPLATZ of Swiss Television (SRF) had a studio painted all white, famous as a sort of *televisual white cube*—in all its metaphorical senses (see Fig. 1). In subsequent corporate design renewals, the program operations remained unchanged, while the aesthetics of the studio architecture

was completely transformed (see Fig. 2). The magazine was now presented against a backdrop of imitation wood side paneling, which evoked similarities to other programs, such as the health magazine PULS or the consulting show NACHTWACH (see Fig. 3). The press subsequently complained about the studio design, describing it as “romanticism of (boy)scouts” lacking only a “camp fire” (Tagesanzeiger 2011a, translated by the author). I will return to this fundamental modification of the program’s concept.

Fig. 1: SRF’s KULTURPLATZ as a White Cube



Source: Still, KULTURPLATZ, 9.12.2009.

Along with the rapid re-launch of new corporate designs, the economic discourse of highest viewership affected the conception of cultural television in so far as it let so-called “third party channels” such as regional stations or the cultural programs on 3sat or ARTE interfere with the public cultural assignment of television. Even today, similar contentual paradoxes and an open-ended tension to define an ‘adequate’ notion of culture can be observed. As intermediary between elitist cultural institutions and a broad television audience, cultural magazines “should overcome the polarization between elitist entertainment and general culture, this is the difference between a culture for the few and a program for the many in a medium for the masses” (Kreutz/Rosenstein 1993: 5, translated by the author).

Fig. 2: “(Boy)Scouts’ romanticism” in KULTURPLATZ after the studio’s re-design



Source: Still, KULTURPLATZ, SRF, 22.6.2011.

Fig. 3: Woodlike décor in the consulting show NACHTWACH



Source: Still, NACHTWACH, SRF, 15.10.2013.

The result of this effort has been a rise in virulent contradictions between culture and television: On the one hand, cultural magazines contribute to the prestige of the public service broadcasters by highlighting the aesthetic difference between their broadcasts and trash programs. On the other, the

unfocused and fragmentary magazine format corresponds to the economy of attention, established and promoted by television. Since the 1960s, cultural television has therefore been able to legitimize its ongoing peripheral existence. From the economic perspective, the format tries to function as a form of distribution for the range of possibilities presented by televisual communication. Heidemarie Schumacher expressed this poignantly: “Anything can be combined with everything, the medium serves as a preparer and machine of reproduction of a colorful, accidental and incoherent empiricism, such as it is offered by the world of warehouses, department stores or supermarkets” (1994: 104, translated by the author).

Nowadays cultural magazines increasingly resemble each other both in terms of format and content. Moreover, they tend to surrender to the pressure of ratings and the normative forms of presentation of an easy and entertaining mediation of culture. It is only in the late night hours when the medium—as Volker Panzer describes it—“is still allowed to dream” (1999: 78, translated by the author), that the magazines realize an aesthetically experimental reflection of culture and the possibility of their formats.

The brevity of reports and the flexibility of their content—a major component of the television and cultural criticism caused by the so called “snack culture”—doesn’t allow for an adequate presentation of culture or art events. The cultural magazine KULTURPLATZ for example, has not received any praise from the press for its daring realignment at the end of 2011: it is produced at a different place of cultural production with the intention of turning itself into an object of the report every week. The magazine despite its good intentions, seems overloaded with chitchat. The Swiss newspaper *Tagesanzeiger* criticized it, saying that “less would have been more, particularly in relation to cultural issues” (*Tagesanzeiger* 2011b, translated by the author). At the same time, the televisual translation of artworks has also not been spared from criticism: “the filmed artworks didn’t show a lot, because the cameraman recognized himself as an artist. Whoever was able to catch single picture fragments should have known for himself what she was looking at, because neither paintings nor sculptures have been defined” (*ibid.*, translated by the author). The expectation of a complete and factual illustration of culture implied by these critiques, however, cannot be met—not least because the imagination of television as a “neutral window view” disregards the framing heterogeneity of the medium.

INTERMEDIAL AESTHETICS BETWEEN CULTURE TELEVISION AND THE ARTS

Televisuality re-stages and re-produces specific views of culture whereby the inconclusive discourses of what should be mediated *as culture* emerge. These conventions of ‘given to be seen’ are both normative and innovative and refer to the open-structured configuration of heterogeneous representations and forms of narration in television. In this sense, media studies claim that since the 1980s, television has merely presented re-visualizations (cf. Caldwell 1995; Adelman/Stauff 2006).

As John Thornton Caldwell (1995) has suggested, the excessive use of strategies of visualization leads to a hyperactive process of presentation and a specific “performance of style”, which is primarily formed by the use of different intermedia methods. The television therefore does not illustrate the world; instead, it processes and differentiates its own as well as other visual forms. Cultural magazines’ reports on artworks in particular apply visual forms and aesthetic concepts resulting in a ‘visualized visualization’. Culture television seems to bring pictures and media closer while simultaneously drawing boundaries between the two, and demonstrates how, in the words of Sam Weber, “we see at a distance” (1996: 116). In other words, “what television transmits is not so much images [...]. It does not transmit representations but rather the *semblance of presentation as such*, understood as the power not just to see and to hear but to place before us” (ibid.: 117). Television, he thus explains, oscillates between exposure and neutralization of a mediated view. The specificity of television therefore lies—following Weber’s argument—in its “specific and constitutive heterogeneity” (ibid.), which describes the constant differentiation from its own mediality. The ability of television to produce and record vision refers to the crucial function of the screen. In Weber’s words:

“the television screen can be said to live up to its name in at least three distinct, contradictory and yet interrelated senses. First, it serves as a screen that allows distant vision to be watched. Second, it screens, in the sense of selecting or filtering, the vision that is watched. And finally, it serves as a screen in the sense of standing between the viewer and the viewed, since what is rendered visible covers the separation that distinguishes the other vision from that of the sight of the spectator sitting in front of the set.” (ibid.: 122-123)

In this sense, the screen is a constitutive medium for the visualization of the world, configured by a historically alterable regime of the gaze. Regimes of gaze then constitute specific discourses of gestures and gazes, which, as cultural repertoires of images are mediated by means of the televisual screen, are as much concerned with self-perception as with the perception of world (cf. Silverman 1996). The screen's surface becomes a heterogeneous space of the televisual itself. Television's decisive factor is thus not its capability to illustrate, but the medial techné of a *machine of imaging and image processing*, and the re-staging of other media in flexible configurations performing, as Caldwell mentions, "the act of consuming images" (1995: 147). Through the adaption and (re-)appropriation of other media and arts, culture television seems to continually resist its own medial specificity (cf. Bolter/Grusin 1999; Friedberg 2009; Manovich 2001; Spielmann 2001). "Through intermedia and pictorialism", Caldwell argues, "television becomes a boundaryless image machine. [...] Television favors images that are specifically about consuming images. In this case the intermedia mode is a key strategy that works to satisfy the medium's appetite for and consumption of imagery" (ibid.: 151). In contemporary television, the perception and definition of reality, what Caldwell calls the *reality effect*, doesn't play a major role. Instead, the differentiation of pictorial form, the so-called *picture effect*, plays a significant role. The aesthetic diversity of picture treatment and collection of the visual culture is performatively displayed such that the picture effect doesn't replace the reality effect. Depending on the broadcasting service or format, these effects are deployed with different strategies and serve as a consolidation of the corporate design and as such clearly differentiate televisual programs.

SCREEN IMAGES: PROCEDURES OF RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE ARTS

In its early days, television was described as a medium which "already [...] is art and with certainty will be the art of tomorrow" (Eckert 1953, quoted in: Daniels 2002: 243, translated by the author). However, in the process of being transformed into a mass medium, it has been conceptualized by media studies and art history mainly as the image-hostile and anti-artistic medium *par excellence*. Television's specific visualizations of art are still of-

ten devalued as mere representations of art. Despite this alleged devaluation, cooperation was established between television stations and art. Gerry Schum, for example, understood television as a new space for art education in which, in line with Malreaux' *Musée imaginaire*, art could address an audience outside of museum and gallery visitors.

The *Television Gallery* was thought to establish new forms of mediating art by using the screen as a two-dimensional exhibition space. The screen was conceived as a space of art education in which different media and their diverse aesthetics could be put in relation to one another (cf. Dobbe 1994; Daniels 2002). Therefore, the reports of cultural magazines allow observation of visual interludes between television and arts, enabling further reflections beyond the conceptualization of television as a *machine of image exploitation* that neutralizes the imagery of images. Analysis of the televisual handling of artworks thus can illustrate how images are transformed into screen images, and what impact this transformation has on contemporary visual cultures. The image of art, circulated by culture television, provides further information about the specificities of television's visual aesthetic. The intermedial aesthetics between arts and television establish, in addition, a renewed question concerning the contemporary conceptualization of the image.

The fundamental characteristics of media differences between television and diverse artforms are scarcely reflected in the reports of cultural magazines. Nonetheless, there are sequences in which, for example, the camera follows the ductus of the painting, or tries to reproduce the formation of the picture through re-staging the painting act in the studio.

Similar to newscasts, reports on art in cultural magazines are characterized by standardized forms of presentation: the overarching format is characterized by three sub-segments, as Gerd Steinmüller (1997) has analyzed in detail. In the context of *identifying segments*, artists are presented through self-portraits or in person— usually in the typical talking-head-format. *Contextual segments*, by contrast, show additional material, such as further works from the artists. Finally, *exploratory segments* translate the visualized art works into a televisual picture language. The arrangement of these segments is always flexible and contributes to the rhythmatization of the reports. The arbitrary nature and interchangeability of the visual elements go together with a general image acceleration, which dissolves any possibility of clear differentiation between the segments.

According to Gundolf Winter (2000), televisual art education creates its own picture stories by means of fragmentation and invariant arrangements of different artworks. These stories do not have much in common with the image-based narration of the respective artworks. Analogous to certain research traditions of art history on the mostly male artistic genius and on great biographies, artworks in the televisual reports are often used to underline the ingenuity of the artist. The above-mentioned *exploratory segments* do not show the artworks in their entirety, but represent them as disassembled fragmentations. In this way television reveals its own manner of seeing and its specific televisual view on art by intervening in the familiar contemplation of art. According to Winter “the imaginary is only authorized within the meaning of the television picture” (ibid.: 455, translated by the author). A self-organized illustration of images is established at the expense of internal image narrations. With the *exploratory* procedures “television generates new images from the imaginary” (ibid., translated by the author) and accentuates its specific capacity to create, to process and mediate images consistently.

By way of intertwining different pictorial principles and notions of imaginary, television acts not only as an allegedly neutral mediation authority but creates new types of images by showcasing their performativity. Winter assumes the suspension of all types of imaginary within the framework of culture television. This seems problematic because he starts with a specific concept of the picture based on dichotomies of reality versus simulation, original versus copy. Postmodern conceptions of pictures from visual culture studies, media studies or art history and artistic approaches—from Duchamp, Warhol or appropriation artists such as Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler or Richard Prince—paradigmatically illustrate that appropriating media or pictures can in no way be understood as a unidirectional strategy. Rather, appropriated media or pictures initiate the condition of the possibility to consider art as a complex interplay—in the sense of *art pour l’art* (cf. Crimp 1993; Graw 2004; Imesch 2006). Hereby, the discursive formation of art, as well as the strategic re-appropriation of mediality and imaginary, is addressed, and consequently artistic and medial strategies are emphasized as interdependences of indifference and settings of difference. This appropriation and re-staging of already existing images as main modalities of culture television can be related to previous artistic methods and practices of pastiche. However, in contrast to the intention of artistic practices, cul-

ture television always strives to institutionalize itself as *Musée télévisonnaire*, which seeks to structure our view on artworks. Other media and art are televisually incorporated to establish the potency of television as a machine of image generation, rendering televisuality a ubiquitous performance of perception. The interrelationship between cultural magazines and their re-visualized objects cannot—as I have argued—be thought of as a unilateral mode of visualization. During the intermedial processes between and with other media, televisuality is constantly exposing itself. This can lead to a hybridization of the category of the picture as it is negotiated on the screen surface. The indifferent visualization and specific experimentations with other media operate not as an “either-or”, but consist in an ongoing shift and oscillation between difference and indifference.

I would like to illustrate the diverse procedures for the transposition of art in televisual cultural magazines with two examples which show the extensive variety of televisual re-mediation of art. The report about Frida Kahlo in Berlin by the cultural magazine KULTURZEIT (3sat) pursues the myth of the famous female artist by featuring an extensive exhibition in Berlin. Already in the context of the magazine’s introduction the moderator reflects the phenomenon of ‘Fridamania’ and refers to the continuous re-staging of the artist’s life and suffering as manifested in her pictures. In accordance with the traditional perspective of art history, the report emphasizes the biographical history of artist’s suffering and the re-production of the mythological creation of an icon by means of art exhibitions. The commercialization of art is further reflected in the introduction of a café called Frida Kahlo. Similarly, the author of the piece comments on long queue in front of the exhibition: “the pilgrimage to her exhibitions is a must; already on the opening day” (translated by the author). Thereupon several photographs of Kahlo are reproduced, evoking the impression that the artist is an important personality or superstar. A presentation of neatly lined up exhibition catalogues emphasizes once again the wide circulation of Kahlo’s images via the mass media. The artworks are displayed in the mode of a simple, quasi-neutral visualization using fast camera movement that resembles a slide show. Additionally, the exhibition’s curator, Helga Prignitz-Poda, interprets the self-portraits in relation to the artist’s biography. Surprising aspects of Kahlo’s work are reproduced in the *exploratory segments*: The *portrait with mask* is not only presented by means of zoom method but also through techniques of dissolving, the picture of the mask appearing to inex-

orably approach the viewer. In front of the assumed hidden self-portrait is a *crying coconut*. For this piece, a real coconut is held up to the camera as a duplication of the metaphor from the previous artwork (see Fig. 4). The report's focus is on the mass media's fascination with Frida as an icon, plausibly re-staged in relation to her tragic biography by means of her self-portraits. Nonetheless, sequences such as the crying coconut refer to and at the same time ironically refuse a reference to the artist's manic occupation with the self as well as the commercialization of the female artist.

Fig. 4: Frida's 'hidden' self-portrait as a "crying coconut"



Source: STILL, KULTURZEIT, 3SAT, 5.5.2010.

A very different and innovative approach is offered by/in the report published in the cultural magazine *aspekte* (ZDF) on the exhibition *Gerhard Richter: Panorama* which was staged in the New National Gallery of Berlin. The report is mixed with aesthetics of a music clip: rap music, off-screen commentary, and both a detailed and overall view of the work are projected in turns on a wall of the metro. Of these, only the last sequence provides insight into the exhibition. At the beginning of the sequence, a quote of Richter, "to paint is a core characteristic like dancing or singing" (translated by the author), is displayed. Forthwith, a young man starts rapping while emphasizing the lyrics with gestures. This magazine report adapts the displayed Richter quote by way of intermedial processes. However, it is not the world famous artist who advances as the central figure in

this report but the young rapper. Through his rapping and gestures, he explores the variable contexts and contents of the works further processing them in a new media frame (see Fig. 5). As in most cultural magazines, the focus of this report is not the exhibition and the personality of the artist, but rather the thoughts that are evoked by pictures of Richter, which are at the same time reflected in the rap song and the rapper's gestures.

Fig. 5: Thinking and rapping with Richter's paintings.



Source: STILL, ASPEKTE, ZDF, 10.2.2012.

TELEVISUALITY AS A REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS OF THE IMAGE?

Through a generally open-structured and historically variable format, cultural magazines are particularly well integrated into aesthetic, socio-cultural and technical frames. The televisual frame demonstrates itself in its own ongoing de-framing. The televisual *dispositif* consequently constitutes itself in its specificity only in the interplay between culture and the arts, which are presented and re-presented in cultural magazines. As such, the *dispositif* of culture television takes part in the formation of a spectatorship's self-perception and the ideal. It does so through its televisual procedures, which oscillates continuously between standardization and innovation, and to a lesser extent through supposedly neutral mediation and report.

Televisual magazines, which are subordinated to the public's cultural remit, have specific but flexibly structured implications. Cultural magazines aim to illustrate the cultural diversity of a nation. However, reportable events should not be presented as neutrally as the political news. On the contrary: according to its own description, products with an autonomous value have to be created. In this view, the explicit norm of the culture remit has a restrictive effect, insofar as the magazines mediate the cultural events they consider relevant, in a comprehensible way, thereby making culture available to a broad audience. It is hardly surprising that since the 1970s our understanding of culture has been continually popularized, has been and is being discussed in close connection with the increase in audiences. This, however, implies a specific and problematic tension between culture and television.

Most recently, with the advent of digital media, culture television has shown an intermedial capacity of appropriating, which always presents self-reflexive moments contrary to the "classic" discourse of the immediate illustration of "world". The re-presentation of museal or performative arts in magazine reports in particular indicates the ongoing dialectic, by challenging different forms of media-enabled perception and views on art, culture and society. In contradiction to traditional approaches of media and television studies, a postmodern concept of media and picture offers further perspectives: The particular focus now rests on the double indifference of the televisual medium towards its appropriated media on the one hand, and the reflexive notion of difference of each re-visualized media on the other. To act as a constitutive frame of what is *given to be seen*, television therefore must continually risk its own televisuality. In the mode of re-representation, culture television may expose the representation of other media on the television screen by means of making visible the perspective of any screen in its re-configuration. The simultaneous presence of various media on the screen surface therefore allows a reflection of different concepts and notions of image.

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