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TELEKRITIK: Über zwei Filme von Peter Nestler

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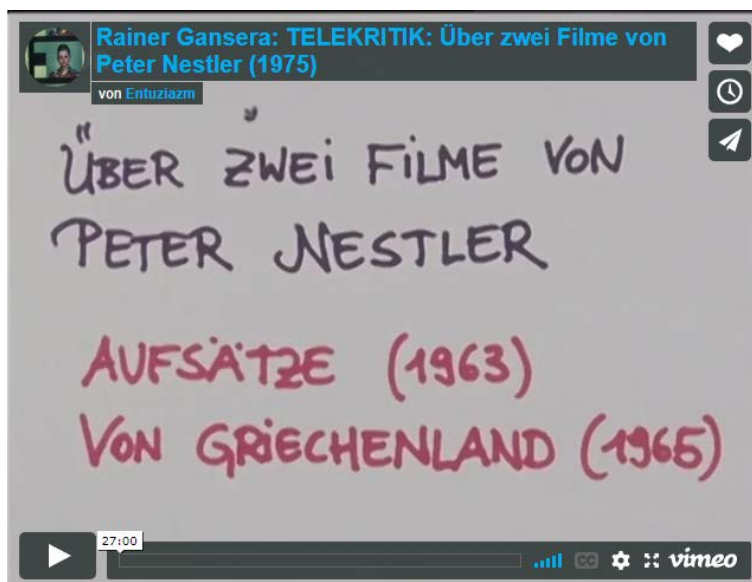
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Director: Rainer Gansera

First broadcast: 28 October 1975



TELEKRITIK was a series of programs with at least ten installments between 1973 and 1975. Its commissioning editor, Angelika Wittlich, had just finished university when she began her work. She recalls:

I had just come to the WDR. I had done German and Romance Studies and was quite clueless. At that time, WDR had taken the decision to act self-critically. There was no concept behind this series. All of a sudden, I was commissioning editor, there was a broadcasting slot that varied in length; a filler, really, and this is how *Telekritik* was

born. Little money, but a lot of freedom. I wanted to work with people like Harun Farocki, Hartmut Bitomsky, and Helke Sander, whose work at dffb I knew. A lot of the authors – including Rainer Gansera – were suggested to me by Harun. Once, there was quite a riot within the station, which even involved the director of the program, Werner Höfer. Farocki had made a 45-minute *Telekritik* called *The Trouble with Images*. There was an enormous discussion with commissioning editors of all the different departments, everybody was excited, and the political journalists felt particularly offended. However, this didn't have any consequences. In those days, things were talked over, and there was a general appreciation of something that was lively and animated. [1]

Within the *Telekritik* format there were two types of programs. There were those that formulated a straightforward critique of the way facts and contexts were reported on television. A segment from an existing feature would be shown, and then the same segment would be scrutinised and taken apart to reveal how little commentary and image have to do with each other. These were the most controversial ones, since they attacked the journalistic feature, one of the core elements in the program, in all its sloppiness and lack of rigorous analysis. Two of the three *Telekritik* programs by Farocki – *The Trouble with Images* and *The Struggle with Images* – established this model. Then there were episodes that turned to the history of documentary filmmaking to provide alternative models to the journalistic, text-driven approach of the feature. Again, contemporary television was the target, but instead of addressing the deficits of journalism directly a more positive choice was made by pointing to examples from the past, and in particular the British documentary movement of the 1930s.[2]

Both *Telekritik* programs featured in this dossier – Rainer Gansera on Peter Nestler, and Harun Farocki on Basil Wright – are examples of this type. Gansera's program on Peter Nestler is unusual in that it highlights a contemporary filmmaker and does not refer back to the 1930s. Gansera, at the time one of the writers and editors of the journal FILMKRITIK, characterises the context of this program as such:

To understand how such a program was possible, it is necessary to bear in mind the influence and inspiration of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, who lived and worked in Munich between 1958 and the early 1970s. For the second wave of 'young German Cinema' – Fassbinder, Wenders, [Rudolf] Thome, [Klaus] Lemke etc. – they had a significance that cannot be overestimated. We were students, had no immediate contact to Straub/Huillet, but were constantly exposed to Straub news stemming from the people involved with the journal FILMKRITIK ([Enno] Patalas, [Frieda]

Grafe, [Helmut] Färber, [Herbert] Linder): [...] Straub's word was the law. If, for instance, he said something disparaging about Alexander Kluge, Kluge was done (at least within the cinephile Munich circles). About Peter Nestler, Straub expressed himself very generously and enthusiastically. In 'Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's "Accompaniment to a Cinematographic Scene"', he used him as an actor. This is the background to this small program, since Straub's word was held in high esteem in the film department of WDR and their sympathisers, to which Angelika Wittlich belonged. This is the context in which I could realise the program on Nestler which accompanied the broadcast of some of his films. [3]

In his vindication of Peter Nestler's films, Gansera stages the office space (located in the WDR headquarters in Cologne), and in particular the desk, as the center of his exploration – a desktop documentary in the analog age. He reads from malicious articles about the filmmaker, shows excerpts from *Aufsätze* and *Von Griechenland*, and emphasises aspects by pointing out details with still photographs of certain sequences.[4] The television set broadcasting a showjumping tournament is the only ironic indicator that this is a *Telekritik* meant to criticise television practices.

To my knowledge, Gansera's *Telekritik* on Nestler was the last one that was broadcast. Why did the program end? Wittlich remembers:

I think TELEKRITIK was not continued since this flexible time slot simply vanished, but I'm not sure about that. I wasn't very sad about it. I got the offer to move to the film department, what I had dreamt about anyway.

In her email, she adds with a sense of surprise: 'Could all this be of any interest today?'

Volker Pantenburg (Freie Universität Berlin)

Audiovisual Essayist

Rainer Gansera is a film critic and writer. In the early 1970s he was one of the editors and a regular contributor to the journal *Filmkritik*. Today, he writes for the German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Amongst his many television essays on cinema, there are programs on Roberto Rossellini, André Bazin, Fritz Lang, and Karl Valentin. For a filmography see here: <http://www.kunst-der-vermittlung.de/dossiers/filmvermittlung-und-filmkritik/rainer-gansera/>

Notes

- [1] Email from Angelika Wittlich to Volker Pantenburg, 20 February 2017.
- [2] Harun Farocki's Telekritik on *Song of Ceylon* is one example, and Hartmut Bitomsky's investigation of Humphrey Jennings is another (*Unter einem Himmel, schwarz von Häusern, von erloschenen Bränden Schwarz*, 1975).
- [3] Email from Rainer Gansera to Volker Pantenburg, 5 March 2017.
- [4] This particular method has been beautifully used by other Filmkritik authors like Helmut Färber or Hartmut Bitomsky. See for instance Bitomsky's *Das Kino und der Tod* (1991) and Färber's *Drei Minuten in einem Film von Ozu* (1988), both of them WDR productions.