URSULA GANZ-BLAETTLER*

SCRIPTED AND STAGED MEDIA REALITIES

When television is defined as a *performing art*, television fiction - or the fictional genres produced for this audiovisual medium - can be described as the result of creative procedures of "world-making" which include *scripting, casting*, and *staging*. While control of the diegetic (or fictional) world is achieved through (pre-)scripting of the when- and whereabouts of the protagonists involved in the eventual story-to-be, the realization of these events asks for places and persons actually "made up" to resemble the places and persons explicitly referred to in the (scripted) narrative. Casting and staging, then, are strategies used to confine (and again, control) the profilmic events which are finally (and only after more, and similarly complex stages of cutting and pasting) presented to a television audience as an original work of televisual performance.

In accordance with recent TV industry labels referring to the still highly popular Reality TV genres as *unscripted* program fare this essay suggests to compare "Reality" and "fiction" in TV entertainment no so much on the grounds of what kind of profilmic event is eventually captured on-camera, but on the grounds of what authoritative shaping of the diegetic world applies, for what (supposed or acknowledged) reason and to what (performative) effect.

Keywords: television production, realism, performance.

* University of Lugano, ursula.ganz-blaettler@lu.unisi.ch

1. Introduction

The term "fiction" is derived from the Latin term *fingere* which means "to build", "to construct", but also "to dress" (in a specific mode, for a specific purpose) and finally "to imagine", "to invent". What is *fictum*, then, stands for the idea of something to be "made" or "made up", or for the product of the resulting construction process. What is *factum*, on the other side, has actually been made, or done, and therefore exists as a fulfilled work or successful procedure - in short, as a *fact*.

Albeit their obvious and close relationship, be it in form or function, the two words hinting at a "making of", or construction process, are usually seen as separated by an unbridgeable gap. Instead of considering them as two sides of a medal, or the two complementary halves of a universe which remains to be explored in all its possibilities, they are explained as contrasting and fundamentally different. What is "fictum", is supposed to be *not* real and *not* true, neither here/now nor anywhere else in the past or future. What is "factum", on the other hand, is supposed to be testified and proven, its (former) existence documented by at least some "indexical trace" (Rosen 2001: 14 f.) left behind. What refers to "factual" reality, therefore, is considered *non*-fiction. Few seem to wonder or to worry about the auto-referential tautology in this argument: by applying such logic as common sense don't we necessarily explain what is "real" by declaring *other* phenomena as imaginary, and vice versa?[1]

This paper is an attempt at differentiating the common paradigmatic concepts used for mediated fact- versus fictionalization by means of introducing three terms which refer explicitly to television as a performing art (a term suggested by Jankowski and Fuchs 1995: 32), namely *scripting*, *casting*, and *staging*. All three terms, or procedures, are used in the performing arts, and therefore imply a kind of "making of", just as *fingere* and *facere* do. But they are not automatically subject of assumptions

---

[1] Wittgenstein said: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist ..." to which Eddo Rigotti responds: "... und was der Fall sein koennte" (Rigotti and Cigada 2004: 217). Such an extended worldview corresponds with the observation by Mooy (1992: 1), whereas "... imagination plays a role, for better or for worse, in our view of reality. More especially it is responsible for the creation of spheres of unreality which interact with spheres of reality. As a result, the borderlines between the two may change significantly, as may the boundary between falsity and truth."

about some kind of implied (+) or allegedly manipulated (-) "objective reality" as immediate reference, as the other two terms invariably seem to be. What is found "out there", prior to the public exhibit and before any movie or television camera starts to roll (... as a profilmic event, in other terms) is usually meant to be either influenced by the mediation prospect and "acted out" for the sake of it, or not enacted at all. With regards to scripting, casting, and staging - and respective authorship and control - we have three specific strategies of fictization at hand, which can help to evaluate degrees of influence, of involvement and interdependence between some profilmic state of events and its upcoming, or intended mediation.[2]

2. Staging

The *stage* is a special place, designed for events or processes out of the ordinary. And it is definitely a virtual place, set up for events or processes yet-to-be. According to the American Heritage Dictionary the term goes for any "raised platform", which may be temporally erected as a workman's scaffold or permanently, and institutionally, set up as a scene for theatrical performances or some other "event of note". It is necessarily a public space, meant to render things overseeable from afar. And it is a safe place, built high to protect the ones up there from intervention by the ones at the bottom - or, in the case of the workman's scaffold, the ones at the bottom from what might fall down from up there by sheer mistake.[3]

Staging an event does necessarily limit its accessibility. The stage is a controlled space and open only to those with granted privilege. Access depends on special skills and capacities (as in the case of the experienced workman or stage actor), but may be based on a temporary allowance also (as in the case of some loyal fan which, by way of her or his intimate

---

[2] In the metaphorical language of filmmaking, I shall refer to "preproduction" only: I will not go further into the actual production process, with camerawork defining angles and looks, and - later - editing processes deciding on the pace, and the actual footage used.
[3] The French and Italian translate the theatrical stage as a "scène / scena" (for special events to be acted out and watched) while the term "stage" is used for a working place where (usually) young people can tentatively, and temporally, test their skills on a specific trade. The German language translates, accordingly, the process of "staging" by "inszenieren".

knowledge of people and settings, is ultimately allowed into the restricted area, or sanctuary).

A *cast* can be many different things as well: The American Heritage Dictionary suggests a "group of actors assigned roles, as in a play". But it can also mean "a rigid plaster dressing, as for immobilizing and protecting". Again the two meanings overlap: To *cast* a spectacle by carefully selecting who is admitted as spectator or not, is an effective means to protect that event from getting out of hand. On the other hand, professional actresses or actors are well aware of the dangers to be *typecast*, in the sense of being "molded", against her or his will, into a stereotypically narrow range of roles assigned.

The *staging* and *casting* processes, with regards to the events to be, are intrinsically linked: To set up a narrative (or another public spectacle) as a performance, be it in a traditional theatre setting or with regards to the successive shooting of feature film footage, requires specific attention to what Seymour Chatman (1978) has called the "existents" of a story: the delimited space where the events are supposed to take place, the set and requisites furnishing that space to fulfil specific expectations associated with the events to come, and finally the cast hired for the representational occasion, which is supposed to perform some symbolical act or acts by way of movement, gestures, conversation - and music maybe.

Preparation for the performance usually includes specific procedures of "make up", for the characters involved just as for the set(s) and props. Some kind of prosthetics are sometimes involved in all three cases of getting a spectacle's existents (in terms of set, requisites, and / or actors) stage-ready.[4]

3. Scripting

Scripting describes any kind of programming activity by which a planned event is either literally written down, step by step, to be rehearsed and

---

[4] I remember a visit to the Cinecittà-Studios, many years ago, where the polysterol set of the movie *Il Marchese del Grillo* (M. Monicelli, Italy, 1981) still loomed as an impressive monument of how time nags at all things out there, over the years. On the other hand I understand Nicole Kidman's prosthetic nose in *The Hours* (S. Daldry, USA, 2002) as a requisite rather than just a make-up device: while she was made to look iconically like Virginia Woolf, the nose apparently helped the actress to enter Woolf's troubled existence as a *possible* world.

performed later, or is put into some other institutional "read-only" form which fixes the events in their temporal and logical order.[5] Just as *staging* implies an explicit or implicit audience to be present in the events to come, *scripting* implies explicit or implicit rules as to how the events in store are to be acted out properly.[6]

While the stage is a virtual place, meant to suggest the possibility of some world-to-be which can only be actualized for the very moment, or "live", the scripting process designs that world-to-be in its virtual, or eventual existence. A play's, or a film's script always lists the existents before the events: What is required later, in terms of specific locations, props, and *cast*, is already pointed out and set up for the respective departments to be provided for or acquired, or actually *made up* from scratch. Scripting renders the "possible worlds" an even safer place than staging does, since it defines and moulds, or literally *cast*s the events themselves. A script foresees that everybody involved in the world-making cast or crew - including location scouts, carpenters, matte artists, costume designers, animal trainers maybe, or computer graphics specialists - is provided with the necessary clues for actualizing the possible world in store. And just as written music provides a specific sequence of events for every instrument, or voice in the ensemble, the theatre or movie script provides a specific sequence of events for every artistic department to follow.[7]

It is the original *scripting* process, then, that sets and prepares the *stage* for eventual things to come. And the more meticulous a script appears in its setting of the events-to-be, the less scope ("Spielraum") may be provided

---

[5] Again, French and Italian use the terminology of the "scène" to define the scriptwriting process: The "scénario" or "sceneggiatura" implies that the script be specifically written for the (theatrical) scene as stage.

[6] Scriptwriting for film or television follows rigid rules as to how many words go into a page, and how many pages of dialogue into a minute of shooting time. That is why most professionals in the business demand a script to be properly formatted according to *Final Draft* or some other trade-approved software.

[7] The actual process from script to stage is not that linear, of course: For once, a script can be rewritten several times, with or without the help of so-called "script doctors". Moreover, audiovisual media such as film and television do not require the events to be staged in their eventual chronological order - and so, while some shooting will take place as indoor, or studio work, some second unit may already be "on location" for outdoor filming.

for improvising, ad-libbing, or other imaginative surprises which might sabotage the desired effect.[8]

4. Fiction versus history, or questioning the documentary mode

Albeit none of the three terms of *scripting*, *staging*, and *casting*, refers solely, and exclusively, to theatrical or other forms of audiovisual storytelling, they appear clearly linked to all professional activities involved in the production of what is commonly called *fiction*. It is in the explicit combination with *narrative* as a specific linguistic or otherwise mediated textual form, that the processes of scripting and staging, altogether with an eventual casting of convenient actors, made up to correspond with the script's intent and the stage's needs, do result in that performing art form commonly identified as (theatre, film, radio or television) *fiction*.[9]

Before I can test my somewhat "reality-free" conceptual design for fiction with regards to different media formats and genres, there are, however, at least two *caveats*. For once, I cannot assure that, if a conventional identification of some content as "fictional" might indeed correspond to at least two of the above-mentioned criteria (say, *scripted* and *staged* narrative), the same equation might necessarily work the other way around.[10] And then there is the sheer existence of theatrical performances based on so-called *documentary plays* (see Paget 1990; Fisher-Dawson 1999) that point to the necessary, and necessarily difficult distinction between what I call "fiction" and what Paul Ricoeur (1983/85) and many others have identified as (again, indexically referred) "history".

[8] The German film actor Hans Albers was notorious for improvising his dialogue, or telling jokes, during the actual takes of his early silent films. It rendered his performances especially memorable for deaf or hearing-impaired audiences that were used to lip-reading. As for actual American television, it was the notorious "nipplegate" (Justin Timberlake baring one of Janet Jackson's breasts while performing live for the television cameras, during the intermission of a major sports' event) which has introduced new measurements against scripted events getting out of hand - such as remote broadcasting, allowing for cutting in time.

[9] Beyond the theatre, meant to publicly "show and tell", there are of course other entertaining spectacles which are likewise programmed and mounted on stage for a musical or circensic, or, well, some other "live" performance.

[10] The basic question of course being if *narrative*, by all means, is considered a prerogative for fiction. Is there, for instance, *fictional* photography, and are there *fictional* holograms?

It is John Corner's suggestion to use the term of the "documentary" merely as an adjective than as a noun (see Corner 2000), in order to assure that its reference is to a simple media technique rather than some kind of "reality-making" device. What is *documentary*, then, can be seen and understood as an attempt to testify of what is or was *actual* at some given moment in time - either as a testifying act of what *is* actually, and currently, out there (the documentarist as investigative journalist), or as a reconstructing act of what *was* at some time out there, but always in reference to some more or less distant past (the documentarist as historian). Only with regards to the second function of the documentary making use of pre-existing historical documents is it possible to imagine *documentary theatre* (which is inevitably staged) based on *documentary plays* (which are inevitably scripted) - as a means to perform history as a spectacle: *live* and before our very eyes.

However, just as John Corner considers the meaning of "documentary" to be too narrow when identified with a factual result rather than an actualizing strategy, I feel slightly uneasy when "history" is associated with well-documented facts rather than with the investigative, and thus necessarily tentative reconstruction of scattered bits and pieces into what might thereafter get to be interpreted as "fact".[11]

(The problem of differentiating fictional from factual narrative is, of course, far from being resolved by such a partial reflection on the subject.[12])

Regardless of the complication whereas my experimental terminology of working definitions might encompass at least some documentary media representations which were hitherto considered symbolic *of* reality rather than symbolic *for* reality (... a reality which cannot be made explicit, only

[11] As a historian dealing with past "facts", and often struggling with the lack of documentation rather than with its abundance, I was taught to beware of premature conclusions, to seek for the complexity of explanations and always keep in mind what might *otherwise*, in the light of some other possibility, have come to be.

[12] Rosen (2001) points to the referential aspects inherent in all media representation which renders pure referring (without some implicit referred as counterpart) highly improbable, while Luhmann (2001: 1) identifies auto-referential *mise-en-abîme* as the main stabilizing factor in everyday processes of reality construction: "Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media." For a more in-depth discussion see also Genette (1991).

interpreted in hindsight),[13] I would like to go on and try to establish a typology of genre on the grounds of what has been suggested so far. And I shall try to sample where, in fact, such typologies are already at work in the field of media representations.

5. A short history of fiction as spectacle and act of belief

Modern *fiction* usually gets associated with the secular thinking up of stories that were not longer necessarily associated with religious teaching or some other higher purpose, such as the mythical building of nation-states (Nelson 1973; Luhmann 1996). As long as *fiction* primarily meant a narrative told right from one person's imagination, or a story thought up and fixed in some written form in order be told later, the two main aspects of the creative process (in terms of *scripting* versus *staging*), did easily blur. Either the thinking and the telling process appeared as one. Or, if there were notes and drafts and blueprints testifying of the construction process, they were dispensable and not longer of any importance once the work was done and finished (or *realized*). As for the listener, or reader, the engagement in the fictional world generated by imaginative willpower resulted in an equally wilful (and thus self-conscious) act of "... *suspended disbelief for the moment*" (the term coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1816; see Coleridge 2004: 490): In order to develop "*poetic faith*" (as Coleridge defined the ability, or readiness, to engage in events, persons and things thought up by somebody else) one had to comply with rules laid out in an implicit, and clearly paradoxical contract:

a) narrators and narratees do accept a specific "where" and "when" to be at least somewhat probable ... despite the very high improbability of the same events to ever actually happen and / or the existents to ever actually be there and then.

b) The acceptance of the fictional world, or diegesis,[14] as a probable and believable one results from a wilful act of suspended scepticism, which is agreed upon by both sides.

---

[13] The difference between symbols conceived as models of reality or models *for* reality can be found in Van Zoonen (1994), where it is applied to two respective media analysis methods, content analysis and semiotics. Iser's recent reflections on the range and registers of interpretation (2001) have lead me further back to Clifford Geertz and his Interpretation of Culture (1973), where the same point is made to distinguish "thin" from "thick" description, and respective worldviews.

[14] The term introduced by Etienne Souriau (1951), in order to define any kind of fictional universe: The "diegetic space" is where the story, with its existents and events, takes place.

c) The involvement with existents and events in the chosen universe is only temporary; *for the moment.*

The first medium to actually come in-between the "thinking up" and the "making up" stages of a fictional narrative was, arguably, the theatre stage. Here the tale was not longer told by the author or by an intermediary narrator, but virtually "demonstrated" and acted out, or shown to the public which, in correspondence, attended a performance.[15] The individual roles could be spoken or otherwise represented by humans, or there were puppets to act as stand-ins. The same goes for the stage: It could be an area which "naturally" fitted its role (a building, a mountain, a forest, etc.) or it was a place purposefully built to fit its representational purpose. With the theatre (or opera) stage as place designated for events to be acted out and the introduction of (visible, and sometimes tangible) elements which were meant to represent other elements within the tale, material culture entered the imaginary space by necessity: from now on, there were all kinds of things specifically "made up" for the purpose of representation and also eventually kept as such - masks for instance, or costumes and wigs. All kinds of props, from the essential murder weapon to the choice of decorating elements indicating a specific time, class or style. Sets and "behind-the-stage" arrangements for sound and lighting effects, etc.

So far the two stages of the creative process of "making up" appear as imaginative and constructive. Worlds (or rather: parts of a specific world) are thought up and, later, made up for representational purposes. What is lacking, still, is the idea of making up existents in the (iconic, or resembling, or spitting) image of other existents. This can be looked at in terms of technique, simply: While the puppet theatre would always emphasize on the artificial look of things and only require human voices and gestures as reminder where the "real story took part", the stage populated by humans could actually try to make the imaginary events look "as natural as possible". Traditional rules of theatre making could then be changed, or overthrown, in favour of an attempt at illusionism: A female role would be played by an actress where there were only actors before. Or the

---

[15] The categories between "telling" and "showing", as exemplified by Plato, may not be of so much of importance here - a gifted narrator may have represented and "acted out" the characters by investing them with different voices, and he may as well have indicated a stage by usurping some kind of public space, complete with sets and props "drawn" into the air.

stage representation of a known building would be made to "actually" look like the real thing, although a symbolic representation would certainly fulfil the same purpose.

It seems that these changes did not happen "just like that", neither were they tied in directly with the evolution of certain media techniques, but rather with dominant institutions loosing their grip on the arts. At the same time in the late Middle Ages when literature started to be interested in secular themes and the whereabouts of individual protagonists as ordinary human beings, much to the contempt of religious authorities and scholars,[16] the perspective (as an individual person's viewpoint) entered the graphic arts, and buildings supposed to represent other, and distant, buildings started to actually look like the respective original.[17]

And yet illusionism in the theatre (and later in film and other audiovisual arts) did not come "naturally" with the beginning of modernity. From the early beginnings on stage performances were meant as symbolic representation, not as an imitation of life, and the contract between the producers of a "show" and the visitors of the respective "spectacle" included the knowledge of the representative standing in for something represented. If we look at the very early and clearly fictional "adventure flicks" in movie history, we find the science fiction genre acted out within theatrical sets and props (Georges Méliès' fantastic moon travels) right beside "historically" reconstructed Western landscapes and habitats (*The Great Train Robbery*, E. S. Porter, USA, 1903). In both cases naturalism, or illusionism, did not seem a necessity for audiences to actually immerse themselves into the respective high-octane speed race and cheeringly suspense their disbelief.[18]

---

[16] For a critical history of early secular fiction in Western Europe see Nelson (1973).

[17] See, for instance, Barthes (1968). As for an example, alleged replicas of buildings visited at the site of the Christ's (empty) grave in Jerusalem have always been found throughout Europe. But it is only from the late 15th century on that such buildings actually seem to be *like* the original instead of functioning as a mere symbolical representation thereof, or there*fore*.

[18] The question remains as to how audiences reacted to the eventual "breaking of the fourth wall", when for instance (at the end of the 1903 short feature) a gun was pointed at the camera and fired several times. While the sudden intrusion into the "safe" space of the spectator must have produced a rush of adrenaline, it also exemplified more than anything else the border separating the spectator's world, or reality, and another one, which was acted out, or reenacted, on screen.

While mainstream cinema experimented with ongoing serial narrative in its very beginning, only to come to rely on the self-contained and fictional feature film as its principal format, radio and television established the serial form as a main format for fictional narrative, right from the start up until now (Hagedorn 1995).

Television fiction, just as radio fiction before, is clearly a product of the private sector, where audiences are to be lured away from eventual alternatives on the market, in order to *first* have a look (or an earful) and *then* stay on. On the base of what radio had already established as institutional playground US broadcasters and program providers soon laid out a canonical procedure for how to develop and broadcast ongoing serial narrative in specific timeslots. As Jankowski and Fuchs describe (1995: 37), these procedures are still valid, and they still point out to a high-investment, extremely risky business. With about 2'000 program ideas reviewed by the executives of a broadcast network each and every year, just about 250 of these will be commissioned as scripts, and only 30 to 40 of these scripts developed into a pilot movie. If maybe ten of the original 2'000 program ideas make it into a weekly prime time schedule, only two or three of these will "survive" the first season (usually autumn to springtime) and come back in the autumn to come ... and maybe the year after ... and the year after ... . All of the *scripting*, the *casting* and *staging* done in vain, however, costs the networks (or some outsourced production company) just as much as the successful end product does. And the prizes go invariably up each year. See Jankowski and Fuchs for 1995 (ibid.): "The process costs $50 to $60 million a year. In other businesses it is known as Research and Development. In television it is called failure, or futility, or a wasteland."

In other words: While commercial television relies - or used to rely, up until very recently - on television fiction to fill up its prime time schedules (... and its afternoon schedules, by way of cheaply staged daily soap operas and repeated cycles of former prime time hit series), the same television fiction is the most expensive program form there is. For once, there is the risk of losing audiences before even "going public" at all. And then there is the creative human factor involved in the performance-to-be, which costs on all levels, and only continues to do so, with regards to the (repeated) scripting, staging and casting processes involved.

6. Factual versus fictional modes in cinema and television

If we look at the history of mainstream cinema it seems that fictional and documentary (or non-fiction) modes of narrating have been carefully differentiated from the very beginning, be it by respective labels, operational structure and / or according uses. There was on the one hand the *topical* as early "visual newspaper" (Rosen 2001: 163) and predecessor of the *news reel* (that referred explicitly to actual events or people), while feature films, animated cartoons or other fictional content (whose resembling of characters alive or dead was considered *purely coincidental*) were seen (at looked at) differently. Not even the more "realistic" amidst the many vanguard, experimental cinematographies such as Italian Neorealism, France's Nouvelle Vague or the British Free Cinema, with their use of nonprofessional actors, improvisational tactics and everyday mundanity as explicit point of departure, seem to have made it their primary goal to break or blur that boundary.[19]

It is only with regards to radio and television, then, that we find the two modes, or representational functions, overlapping to such an extent that distinction becomes difficult, and regularly so. As Paul Kerr (1990) recounts, early television programs in Britain did often stretch the boundary, and often self-consciously, deliberately so. While early actuality had to be captured in somewhat "staged" representations, due to technological constraints rather than out of aesthetic reasoning, many other programs were publicly labelled as *factual* exactly for their Free-Cinema-like realistic style - despite their use of scriptwriting, cast and (staging) crew. ITV's *Coronation Street*, for instance - the influential soap opera which resulted from the so-called *dramatized documentary* school and still relies, up to these days, on 20 millions regular viewers each week - was, according to Kerr, initially described by critics as *non-fiction*, with regards to its unusual grittiness and non-compromising representation of working-class existence.

Seen from this perspective, the term of Reality TV, which both implies fictional programs striving for actualization and factual programs incor-

---

[19] This is not to say that such experiments don't exist or haven't been successful at conquering new grounds: Recent examples include inventive production (and marketing!) strategies such as the one used for *The Blair Witch Project* (see Telotte 2001) or the inspirational Danish *Dogme95* manifesto (see, for instance, Walters 2004).

porating fictionalizing strategies for the purpose of heightened control or spectacular value, is not so much referring to a novelty, but acknowledging a dilemma and staking out a problematic field of hybridization which seems to be as old as television itself. And exactly because television as a *performing art*, since its early live-only stages, had to struggle to access some profilmic *reality* out there without losing its grip on (or control over) it, it seems so important to deconstruct the actual reality claim of Reality TV for what it is supposed to be, this time around.

7. Reality TV as *casted* and *staged* fiction

The American trade paper *Variety* devotes many of its television-oriented pages to the development of what is referred to as *Reality*: In its issue of 19th April 2004, advertisement prices were compared between prime time series such as *Friends* and ongoing Reality shows such as *American Idol* or *Survivor*. With the result that "... for all the talk of sitcoms ruling supreme when it comes to broadcast network ad rates, a look at the actual ad rate numbers proves a fairy tale come true for the reality genre."[20] The *Variety* article features a table for direct comparison of advertisement costs, with *Reality* on the left and *Scripted* on the right, by this indicating that traditional fictional program fare is based on scripts, while the *other* prime time program fare is not. Similarly, other *Variety* articles emphasize *casting* as a necessary ingredient for Reality TV based on talent search, with the boundaries blurring between searches done in the realm of entertainment (such as in *American Idol*) and other searches done in the world of business (such as in *The Apprentice*, with Donald Trump "firing", or eventually "hiring", aspiring candidates for a lucrative management position).

Thus, the Reality genre (or its according formats) can be described as distinct from traditional television fiction in terms of being *non-* or *unscripted*,[21] while it can be accounted for as similar to traditional television fiction in terms of being *casted*, just as other television series or serials made

---

[20] McClintock (2004).
[21] The distinction acknowledged by Bonner (2003: 3): "Following the fragmentation of the television audience caused by the development of pay-TV, broadcast television, which remains the site where most programmes originate, needed to produce increasing numbers of cheap programmes in order to stay profitable and it turned increasingly to the ordinary

for entertainment are. The *performing* art of Reality TV, then, includes staging as another indispensable process for getting *casted* programs off the ground - here addressed as procedure, or strategy whereby aspects of franchising and copyright are most prominently *mis-en-scène*, in terms of sets and lights used, of program logos applied, or products strategically placed as props (for the blurring of this so-called "last boundary" between program and advertisement see Jost 2002: 130).

As for programming strategies, Reality TV clearly follows most of the patterns fictional television has introduced long ago, with regards to long-term serialization, focalization upon specific (sets of) protagonists and strict periodicity. That goes for the particular genre of the *docu soap* (a documentary workplace series broadcast in several instalments and centered on protagonists *casted* with regards to their activities involving strong emotions and quick decisions) as well as for the many sub-genres of more or less competitive Reality games staged as a narrative. Here, candidates - chosen for their looks, for their self-proclaimed skills, their proclaimed lack of fear maybe, their wish to find a significant other or just become the celebrity of the month - are carefully matched to fit into a *cast* which then is restrained to a specific area as *stage* and left with specific challenges and respective timeframes or other constraints.[22] While there is no specific order of events to be followed (as in a script), rules apply to when and where challenges are to be faced by whom, and with what reward in store. The rest of the story is up to the cast's functioning as such, with regards to implied roles accepted or rejected, but also improvisational talents, imaginative willpower (or wilful "suspension of disbelief"), and group dynamics.

Reality television, then, is distinct from fictional television - as we know it - only by two properties which may count not as much with regards to formula and formulaicity as they do in economical perspective:
1. *unscripted* programs are cheaper to produce than scripted ones, since there is no hiring of expensive, highly skilled scriptwriters required for each and every segment, and

---

to do this. Substantial increases in lifestyle programming and the new category of programming often called 'reality TV', but coming to be known industrially with a little more accuracy as 'unscripted programming', have been the most significant changes."
[22] For the process of casting reality shows see Alpert (2004).

2. programs casting *nonprofessionals* are cheaper to produce than programs employing trained actors which have to be paid for their performance as well as their rehearsing time.[23]

On the other hand there are considerable licence fees - similar to the ones for sports' programs - to be paid to the authors of the original idea of an unscripted program, and there are prizes - often expensive ones - to be won for candidates and audience members alike. That is why Reality TV, as a prime time magnet for large audiences, is still fairly expensive to produce: According to Livio (2004: 16) reporting from the Swiss *Golden Rose Festival* for entertaining programs, the costs of a successful Reality TV format in 2004 were about two times to ten times less than the development of a successful drama series. This considered, the investment in new ideas and fresh formulas is just as crucial as in the case of written programs and expensive star vehicles - and the stakes only get higher.

While staging a Reality TV format still does come cheaper than the staging of a complex and likewise believable fictional world, with the set(s) being far more restricted and the props far less varied, there do arise questions of control (of the stage as restricted space, and its inhabitants, or visitors, cast in specific parts), and they only become more vital over time. The same is true for the events supposed to evolve in specific (licensed) patterns and according to distinct rules set out in the respective manual. The many control issues at stake finally eventually imply that viewer access to programs be not direct and "live", but preferably *remote* and distanced - as is indeed the case with most Reality TV concepts which have recently be developped.[24] All of this indicates that Reality TV is not "really" aiming at representing some kind of mediated "out there", but head-

---

[23] With regards to fiction, the status and price tag of some acting talent can vary considerably depending on her or his already established "bankability" or appeal to large audiences. When referring to "talent" and respective status, here, I mean to address specific skills needed for fulfilling an acting commitment, not some general celebrity status. However, there are many Reality formats just about to develop a "celebrity" or V.I.P variety - with some more generic boundaries blurring.

[24] See, for instance, the program line-up for US-American cable channel "Arts and Entertainment" (A&E). In: *Variety* (2nd February 2004, section A6): *Dearly Departed* is a docu soap following life and death issues raised in a San Diego funeral home. *Family Forensics* has an experienced team of forensic experts screening the house of an absent family for evidence of every individual's specific lifestyle. *Dog the Bounty Hunter* is another docu soap following the whereabouts of a freelanced adventurer and his twelve kids.

ing towards some other institutionalized form of *partly scripted*, or other-wise tightly controlled and - nevertheless - *casted* and *staged* form of tele-vision fiction.

8. Synopsis

The term of *fiction* defines stories which follow specific (formulaic) pat-terns by evoking people and places that may - in audiovisual performing media such as (traditional) cinema and television - be "stood in" by other people and places. Such programs are meant to be followed in relative comfort and safety, insofar and as long as the contractual condition implied both in the scripting and the staging process remains respected whereas we, as willing witnesses, suspend our disbelief for the moment. *Reality*, on the other hand, makes partial use of the same techniques in order to imply some *actuality* without risking a) any of the actuality-implied possibilities of harm or loss, and b) too big an investment in expensive world-making.

"Reality", finally, is accessible only in terms of continuous (auto-)refer-ence to some social construction and collective interpretation thereof (see Luhmann 1996) and thus only *one* of many possible worlds out there, waiting to be actualized by means of deliberate, and wilful acts of belief in what is - or was - or might one day be - permanent.

References

ALPERT, SASHA (2004). Famous just for being yourself. *Variety*, 2nd February: 98.

BARTHES, ROLAND (1968). L'effet de réel. In: *Communications XI* (English translation: The Reality Effect. In: BARTHES, ROLAND. The Rustle of Language, New York: Hill and Wang 1989: 141-148).

BERGER, PETER L. & LUCKMANN, THOMAS (1966). The Social Construction of Reality, Garden City, New York: Anchor.

BJONDEBERG, IB (2002). The Mediation of Everyday Life. Genre, Discourse, and Spectacle in Reality TV. In: JERSLEV, ANNE (ed.). Realism and "Reality" in Film and Media, Northern Light Series, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press: 159-192.

BONNER, FRANCES (2003). Ordinary Television, London: Sage.

CHATMAN, SEYMOUR (1978). Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

COLERIDGE, SAMUEL TAYLOR (2004). Biographia Literaria. In: IBID. Coleridge's Poetry and Prose. Authoritative Texts, Criticism, New York: Norton: 372 ff.

CORNER, JOHN (consulted 04/04/26). Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and Their Functions, Changing Media, Changing Europe: Working Papers No. 1 of the European Science Foundation (see www.lboro.ac.uk/research/changing.media/publications.htm).

CORNER, JOHN (2002). Documentary Values, in: JERSLEV, ANNE (ed.). Realism and "Reality" in Film and Media, Northern Light Series, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press: 139-158.

CORNER, JOHN (2000). What Can We Say About Documentary? In: *Media, Culture and Society* XXII, 5: 681-688.

FISHER DAWSON, GARY (1999). Documentary Theatre in the United States, Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.

GANZ-BLAETTLER, URSULA (2003). "Tu n'est pas seul!" Big Brother en Allemagne. In: LOCHARD, GUY & SOULEZ, GUILLAUME (eds.). La télé-réalité, un débat mondial. Les métamorphoses de Big Brother, Média Morphoses, hors série, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France: 37-41.

GEERTZ, CLIFFORD (1973). The Interpretation of Cultures, New York: Basic Books.

GENETTE, GÉRARD (1991). Fiction et diction. Paris: Ed. du Seuil (English translation: Fiction and Diction. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993).

GOODMAN, NELSON (1983). Fact, Fiction and Forecast, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

GUYNN, WILLIAM (1990). A Cinema on Non Fiction, Cranbury: Associated University Presses.

HAGEDORN, ROGER (1995). Doubtless to Be Continued. A Brief History of Serial Narrative. In: ALLEN, ROBERT C. (ed.). To Be Continued ... Soap Operas Around the World, London & New York: Routledge: 27-48.

ISER, WOLFGANG (2001). The Range of Interpretation, New York: Columbia University Press.

JANKOWSKI, GENE F. & FUCHS, DAVID C. (1995). Television Today and Tomorrow. It Won't Be What You Think, New York: Oxford University Press.

JERSLEV, ANNE (ed.) (2002). Realism and "Reality" in Film and Media, Northern Light Series, Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen & Museum Tusculanum Press.

JOST, FRANÇOIS (2002). L'empire du Loft, Paris: La dispute.

KERR, PAUL (1990). F for Fake? Friction Over Faction. In: GOODWIN, ANDREW & WHANNEL, GARY (eds.). Understanding Television, London & New York: Routledge: 74-87.

LIMA, LUIZ C. (1988). Control of the Imaginary. Reason and Imagination in Modern Times, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

LITTLEWOOD, DEREK & STOCKWELL, PETER (eds.) (1996). Impossibility Fiction. Alternativity - Extrapolation - Speculation, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

LIVIO, BALTS (2004). Staendige Suche nach dem "new big thing". Umschau auf dem Marktplatz der Rose d'Or. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23th April: 61.

LUHMANN, NIKLAS (1995, 1996). Die Realitaet der Massenmedien, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag (English translation: The Reality of the Mass Media, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2000).

McCLINTOCK, PAMELA (2004). Mad Ave's firm grasp on reality. Rates for *Survivor, American Idol* best scripted fare. *Variety*, 19th April: 15, 20.

MOOY, JAN J. A. (1993). Fictional Realities. The Uses of Literary Imagination, Amsterdam: Benjamins.

NELSON, WILLIAM (1973). Fact or Fiction. The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

PAGET, DEREK (1990). True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage, Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.

PONECH, TREVOR (1999). What Is Non-Fiction Cinema? On the Very Idea of Motion Picture Communication, Boulder: Westview Press.

RENOV, MICHAEL (1993). Toward a Poetics of Documentary. In: Ibid. (ed.). Theorizing Documentary, London & New York: Routledge: 12-36

RICOEUR, PAUL (1983/85). Temps et récit, 3 voll., Paris: Ed. du Seuil (English translation: Time and Narrative. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984/88).

RIGOTTI, EDDO & CIGADA, SARA (2004). La comunicazione verbale. Milano: Apogeo.

ROSEN, PHILIP (2001). Change Mummified. Cinema, Historicity, Theory, Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

RYAN, MARIE-LAURE (2003). Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Intertextuality in Literature and Electronic Media, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

SOURIAU, ETIENNE (1951). La structure de l'univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie. *Revue Internationale de Filmologie* VII-VIII: 231-240.

TELOTTE, JAY P. (2001). The *Blair Witch Project* Project. Film and the Internet. *Film Quarterly* LIV, 3: 32-39.

VAN ZOONEN, LIESBET (1994). Feminist Media Studies, London: Sage.

WALTERS, TIM (2004). Reconsidering *The Idiots*. Dogme95, Lars von Trier, and the Cinema of Subversion? *The Velvet Light Trap* LIII: 40-54.