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Cool premedialisation as symbolic capital of innovation: On intercultural intermediality between comics, literature, film, manga, and anime

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Almost all media theories regard intermediality as a technical or semiotic phenomenon, considering its social impact only with respect to economic but not aesthetic strategies, that is, potential innovations on the market of cultural goods. Explanations for the intercultural manga boom are good examples in that regard. In general, they refer to four typical arguments: Firstly, the fact that manga series entered the market as complete editions so that they could satisfy youth's frenzy to read comics; secondly, the fact that manga volumes are cheaper than the common comics making them more easily

available to young people on the mass market; thirdly, the fact that a new generation of youth culture looks for distinction from their comics-reading parents; and finally, the world wide accessibility of Japanese anime and its aesthetics due to the proliferation of respective TV broadcasts since the late 1980s (Groensteen 2006: 91–93). All these explanations are functional ones because they only focus on media reception while leaving users' aesthetic activities untouched. But today manga is more than simply comics "Made in Japan". If one considers that not only a new readership was created by manga during the 1990s but also a group of non-Japanese manga artists, one must acknowledge the existence of a specific taste practice which has triggered the manga boom in European and U.S. markets.

When Tezuka Osamu visited the largest European comics festival in Angoulême in 1983, the western media did not recognize him at all (Groensteen 2006: 17). Already called the "god of manga" in Japan, Tezuka was still an unknown person abroad. This raises the question why western youth culture was not interested in manga aesthetics before the early 1990s? Below, I will try to answer this question by considering intermedia and intercultural effects within the world wide distribution of symbolic forms. I do not assume that my argumentation will explain the phenomenon completely. Rather, it may provide a first perspective that is to be endorsed by further research. I shall argue that a certain manga sensitivity existed long before the actual manga boom, as part of a specific habitus of popular taste which was structured by the conjuncture of new and old media. But this popular habitus did not only result from the interplay between old and new media. The following description of intermedia relations between literature, comics, animation, cinema, and the internet may serve as a first example to illuminate how the taste of popular culture is able to turn the mass market's tendency towards normalization into the power of distinction. A habitus not only supports tacit knowledge in legitimate fields of culture but it also mobilizes the tacit taste of distinction against one's own legitimate culture. This can become explicit through intercultural communication.

Before showing how the aesthetic stimulus of the manga boom in the western world came into being, I will give a short review of recent theories of intermediality in regard to social effects: Firstly, the book by Grusin and Bolter with their hypothesis that all mediation is remediation, and secondly, Henry Jenkin's theory of the world wide transmediality of culture.

Grusin and Bolter try to show that not only can new media remediate old ones but vice versa as well. For the latter, they refer to the web structure in television news.

Yet, thereby they analyze only the TV news' citation of the semiotic surface of the World Wide Web. They do not take into account that the web is a medium of social dialogue, not a one-way stream of information like TV news. The citation of the web design by television is nothing but semiotic design. Therefore, Bolter and Grusin do not really go beyond the older media theory of Marshall McLuhan, reproducing his logic of teleological progress and technological determinism although arguing against the teleological view of older media theory (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 55). But a real criticism would have to show that old media are able to be more innovative than new media, which Bolter and Grusin do not. Rather, they take the computer as the standard to understand intermediality, tacitly confirming the technological determinism of classical media theory:

The supposed virtue of virtual reality, of videoconferencing and interactive television, and of the World Wide Web is that each of these technologies repairs the inadequacy of media that it now supersedes. In each case that inadequacy is represented as a lack of immediacy, and this seems to be generally true in the history of remediation. Photography was supposed more immediate than painting, film than photography, television than film, and now virtual reality fulfills the promise of immediacy and supposedly ends the progression. (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 60)

This quote demonstrates a clearly teleological view. However, if one puts the relation between older and new media into intermedia and social perspectives, American comics of the 1940s can serve as an example for the innovation of a new media by an old one, that is, movies by comics. On the one hand, comics aesthetics exhibited a parasitic imitation of movies; but then again, comics could make Superman fly over the city, something the camera was not able to imitate at this time. It took almost forty years until the equipment of cinema was finally able to produce the same reality effects of such flights through skyscrapers in *Terminator II*, with permanently changing perspectives of a moving camera. Recently, film adaptations of superhero comics are booming in Hollywood.

In the first editions of the *Superman* comics, the hero could not fly. He only could make far jumps. Superman learned to fly first in the animated cartoon, an art form located between cinema and the graphic arts. Since then flying has been the hallmark of superheroes during their remediation by TV and radio. In other words, the virtuosity of graphic art anticipated a modern kind of cinema that the contemporary movie was

not able to redeem until the 1990s. The cartoonists demonstrated their virtuosity by using extreme camera perspectives inclined to exaggerate the effects of the technical equipment itself. French avant-garde film maker Alain Resnais was one of the few to recognize in the early 1960s that comics aesthetics had developed many elements of modern cinema long before their adoption into cinema. This relationship between cinema and comic has probably fallen into oblivion because cinema caught up with comics increasingly. By now, our cinema-familiarized gaze regards cinema as the very cause of such elements.

In social classes with lesser cultural capital, the virtuosity to draw realistically is always appreciated as the sign of a genius artist. From the standpoint of institutionalized contemporary art, this is a misunderstanding of legitimate culture. Since the early 20th century, the avant-garde of legitimate art tended to dissolve the representation of reality. The social classes with lesser cultural capital lack the code to recognize or even understand legitimate art (Bourdieu 1979: 367–371). But exactly this misconception of virtuosity as high culture in classes with lesser cultural capital has been the motor for the innovative cinematic aesthetics in comics. More exactly, one may say that these aesthetics conveyed a feeling for the cold equipment of modern technologies at a time when cinema's mass market itself tried to suppress any recognition of the apparatus behind the picture in order to favour both an untroubled readership of the story and empathy with the hero. Walter Benjamin was the first to describe this so-called equipment-free aspect of cinema:

In the theatre one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the movie scene that is being shot. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology [blaue Blume der Technik]. (Benjamin 1968: 233)

By contrast, comics artists induced an awareness of the camera gaze because they tried to satisfy the aesthetics of virtuosity by employing extreme optical perspectives. Their virtuosity gave them the ability to be more cinematic than cinema itself. It was this parasitic exaggeration of cinema provoked by the very competition with cinema on the

mass market that brought about the above-mentioned innovation of graphic authorship.

At the same time when Benjamin discussed the equipment-free aspect of film, Bertolt Brecht repudiated the mass market cinema because of its inclination to invite empathy with heroes, something which, of course, applies to the comics industry as well. Whereas Brecht rejected the aesthetics of mass production, he looked nevertheless for possibilities to appropriate the cold-equipment aesthetics from cinema. Brecht claimed to be a technophile author referring to the take-over of cinematic effects to his poetry in order to distinguish himself from the storytelling in the mass market cinema (Brecht 1971: 118). Under the conditions of 20th century mass communication, his claim confirmed a strategy which had been characteristic of modern authorship, especially since Goethe and Flaubert. Both Goethe and Flaubert aimed at a cold description without any empathy in order to distinguish themselves from the orchids of romantic narration, i.e. empathy with the hero.

Brecht tried to renew this aim of modern authorship for avant-garde literature in the early 20th century by appropriating the modern media's sense for cold apparatuses. Brecht realized that the storytelling of mass market cinema fostered empathy with the hero, but he failed to recognize that the technically outdated graphic authorship was able to evoke a love for cold equipment despite its traditional storytelling. As an author of theatre plays and novels, he had a sense for the historic situation of literary narration, but not for cartoonists' authorship.¹ Yet, when adventure comics like *Superman* and *Batman* came about, the American industry of pulp novels imploded (Fuchs and Reitberger 1973: 201). This part of publishing had to convert into comics production. Obviously, the first transmedia encounter of comics, animation, TV and radio which occurred long before the film adaptations of superhero comics, cannot have been triggered by storytelling only. So, where shall we look for the aesthetic stimulus of such transmediality?

Henry Jenkins offers useful arguments against the technological teleology of media theory by observing new media effects at the end of the 20th century. Against the attempt to see the computer as the medium of all media because of its ability to imitate all media effects, Jenkins states that the future of media is not to be found in one single black box. On the contrary, the mass market exhibits a new tendency towards

1 The film served Brecht as a means of distinction in the field of literature against Thomas Mann. Mann, like Brecht, tried to apply a double perspective in his writing ('doppelte Optik' according to Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*). Both aimed to write for an intellectual avant-garde and lower classes of cultural capital, but Brecht could distinguish himself against Mann as more modern because of his proclaimed model of the film.

extension, suffice to mention a film like *The Matrix* whose subject crossed over into video games, comics and anime.

Whereas old Hollywood focused on cinema, the new media conglomerates have controlling interests across the entire entertainment industry. Warner Bros produces film, television, popular music, computer games, web sites, toys, amusement park rides, books, newspapers, magazines, and comics. (Jenkins 2006: 16)

Jenkins calls this phenomenon “convergence culture” because the distribution of the same subject across different media is rooted in a common aesthetic experience, not in a black box such as a computer. Concentrating not on media themselves but their users as a constitutive factor of the transmedia phenomenon, he fails to explain the aesthetic stimulus by stating, “transmedia storytelling is the art of world making” (Jenkins 2006: 21). Of course, storytelling is a strong aesthetic stimulus of the mass market but in the age of intermediality, it certainly is not the exclusive property of transmedia effects. In order to refute generalized assertions, comics’ transmedia effect, which stimulated the shift from pulps to adventure comics in the 1940, is a good example. It is also noteworthy, that the syndicates of the comics industry (Marvel, especially) did not publish cartoonists’ names prior to the 1960s because they feared that artists would claim more money if they were known by name. Only the author of the original pulp story appeared on the cover of comic books. Obviously, in this case storytelling was not the social motor of comics’ first transmediality. Transmediality was rather fostered by both the new grammar of images whose premediation, or anticipation of new media, showed an affinity for the cold equipment of cinematic effects, and the aesthetics of virtuosity. We do not live in a discourse society but in a society of intermedia practices.

The combination of the affinity for cold equipment with the aesthetics of virtuosity reveals an aesthetic openness between traditional culture and new technologies of mass communication in popular culture. Therefore, this combination is indeed not just re-mediation but an innovating pre-mediation of future media by already existing media. Furthermore, a new technology of the mass market can never yield such premediation because of its tendency to avoid any awareness of the equipment. Whenever storytelling tends to avoid such awareness of equipment, putting new technologies into service of empathy, it leads to cultural normalization.²

² The concept of normalization was introduced into the history of science by Georges Canguilhem. Michel Foucault also used it for his description of power in the history of science. Both describe a cold practice of amplifying modern individualizations: observing and objectivating every little difference

In the 1990s, the impact of the equipment-armed aesthetics of comics was caught up by computer-animated films, *Terminator II* (1992) being the first. Superman's flight through the row of skyscrapers could be shown in a very realistic manner now. The difference between comics and cinema has been a permanent incitation for cinematic normalization. Indeed, the recent boom of 3D film adaptation of superhero-comics is just the last step of this normalization in which comics completely lost their premediating properties. Instead of comics, youth culture has turned to the aesthetics of manga since the 1990s, where it found a strategy to renew its habitualized love for cold equipment. What kind of pictorial grammar conveys the popular taste for distinction against normalization now?

In 1947, Tezuka created his manga *New Treasure Island (Shin-Takarajima)* in a modern style with cinematic effects by showing us, among other things, how a car is approaching as if in single drawings for an anime.³ The original version was reedited in the early 1980s because meanwhile Tezuka had been recognized as the pioneer of manga's typical grammar. It is well known that Tezuka was influenced by early Walt Disney productions. In Disney's first animated cartoon *Steamboat Willie*, the movements appear stumbling because of the stop motion practice.⁴ In order to make these movements reasonable and to sustain the normalizing equipment-free aspect, Disney employed rhythmic music. By contrast, Tezuka's new style of manga drew attention to the apparatus which makes images move in drawn cel animation. In the 1990s, western youth culture became aware of this kind of affection for cold equipment, as an alternative to American adventure comics which could no longer convey this feeling due to the perfectionism of film adaptations.

Not only in that regard does the relation between manga and anime play a constitutive part to fuel anew the affinity for cold equipment in the western world. In Japan, a mangaka is not rarely also the author of an anime by the same title. *Akira*, for example, the animated film of one of the earliest manga series read in western languages, contains sequences which are typically anime with respect to giving images between individuals with scientific methods (e.g. statistics). But cultural normalization takes the other direction. A film for the mass market weakens individuality by setting off the individuality of heroes, the good and the bad are clearly discerned in order to provide empathy. Besides such obvious differences constructed by storytelling in all mass media, one of the best evidence for the normalization of cinema is its equipment-free aspect. In a nutshell, normalization is the harmony of storytelling with an equipment-free aspect. André Bazin for example, who was a critical forerunner of the aesthetics of the *Nouvelle Vague* in the 1950s, regarded the narration dominating the cut as clear evidence of aesthetic normalization. This was to him one of the reasons why he favoured the films of Orson Wells with their long, cut-free sequences as the model for the new avant-garde (Bazin 2007:76).

3 For images look here: http://www.thefullwiki.org/History_of_manga (last access: 20 Sept., 2011)

4 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TPbpvP-okM> (last access: 20 Sept., 2011)

a double code of narration: firstly, the respective sequence can be seen simply as an element of meaning within a linear story, and secondly, as an extradiegetic narration about the collision of magic belief and media culture—e.g. the scene in which toys of a bear, a rabbit and a car approach the protagonist Tetsuo in stumbling movements, and transform into monster ghosts while continuing their stumbling walk.⁵ Whereas this sequence is accompanied by rhythmic music, it lacks any dialogue. But in contrast to the early Disney films, the employment of music as a permanent justification for stumbling movements was quite outdated in the late 1980s when *Akira* was made. Anime's mass market had already been normalized by storytelling through dialogues, due to the longer formats of feature films and TV series. Older practices of harmonizing storytelling and apparatus had been depreciated on the mass market. Precisely therefore, such apparently retrograde practices could serve as a tool of aesthetic premediation, directed against technological perfection and “hot” normalization: Now, such practices help to distinguish sequences from each other, leaning on an awareness of the apparatus on one hand and pure storytelling on the other. This difference can also be found in Oshii Mamoru's anime *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. The sequence of the puppets' parade, for example, juxtaposes the stumbling movement of the puppets and especially real persons with the perfect movement of the travelling camera accompanied by music.⁶ Equipment-free and equipment-armed aspects of anime narration are presented at the same time. On the one hand, this points to the cold, mechanical effect of cinema: The repetition of the single timeless picture is constitutive for the illusion of movement. On the other hand, it reinforces the magic of film: The viewer assumes to see movements, although it becomes visible at the same time that cinema never shows images of movement but the movement of images.

It is important to keep in mind that this cannot be understood in the sense of the Deleuzian “time-image.” According to Deleuze, the time-image decentralizes a story or interrupts the linearity of normalized storytelling and meaning (Deleuze 1997: 53-62). But in the case of drawn manga, the cinematic effect of image-repetition triggers the feeling of a speed up because the repetition of panels with very small transformations fosters a faster reading, but this is not intended to stop dramatic action. Likewise in anime, the visible difference between moving image and stop motion does neither serve the decentralization of linear storytelling as such. Rather, it supports the story

5 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFEePk-UYFk&feature=related>: 00:08:19–00:09:55 (last access: 20 Sept., 2011)

6 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qdc_Cfi1-k&feature=related: 00:01:38–00:02:25 (last access: 20 Sept., 2011)

while offering the decentralizing code of cold aesthetics at the same time. It is not the Otherness of the time-image that becomes visible but the difference between timeless images and movement, and by no means at the expense of the main focus on the linear story. In regard to narration, the timeless image in such sequences has both extradiegetic and intradiegetic functions. This, however, marks a difference within popular culture and its normalization, not a distinction of legitimate art production against normalizing popular culture. Since this social difference remains untouched by Deleuze's philosophical theory which does not acknowledge different degrees of legitimacy in art production.

In addition to the affinity for traditional virtuosity, found in handcrafted art production, the differently habitualized cultural traditions of this affinity may also provide a resource for innovative premediation. Whereas during the 20th century cartoonists and their virtuosity constantly incited the mass market of high-tech media to normalize media differences, that is, between the equipment-free aspect of cinema and comics' potential of cool premediation, the late 20th century saw normalization completed, which provoked the taste of popular culture to employ intercultural communication for a renewal of that difference. Europe has a long tradition of hybrids between nature and machine. Beginning at the time of the Renaissance, it showed a first peak with the iatromechanism. Even Immanuel Kant who chose natural beauty over the beauty of artworks justified the iatromechanism, i.e. the medical description of the human body as a machine. But at same time, there is a strong tradition in Europe which condemns the communicative machine as a diabolic apparatus. In E.T.A Hoffmann's novel *Sandman*, men distrust women as robots if they are able to dance in a perfect rhythm. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, the diabolic robot seducing men to set off a revolution is disguised as a woman. And the leader of the aggressive Borgs in *Star Trek* is a woman as well. The disruption of the male observer's control by brainy communication with machines has to be demonized as the corruption of women, the "natural" representatives of communication. But in Japan, the Sony dog has become a hit among elderly women, and Oshii Mamuro, the author of the anime *Innocence (Ghost in the Shell II)* regards the communication with the machine as a possibility for a better understanding of the human condition, as can be deduced from his quoting Donna Haraway. Haraway criticizes the NASA concept of cyborgs as a male monopolization of the transgression between nature and technology whereas women have to represent the innocent and purely natural. By contrast, cyborgs in Japanese manga and anime are mainly female. This affinity for communicating with cold machines was accepted in western

youth culture just at the moment as cinema had caught up with the premediality of comics, and it paved the way for a new symbolic distinction against normalized graphic authorship by film.

Although manga and comics are, as far as their aesthetics is concerned, closely interrelated with American movies, their way of premediating cinema has culturally differed. This cultural difference does not get suppressed at any rate by mass communication though. Within one's own culture, new media may easily transform the popular love for cold equipment into a habitualized desire for normalisation, but intercultural communication holds the potential to rearticulate this love and turn it against normalization. Intercultural communication is therefore able to unfold distinction from below. After all, distinction is not only a power of so called high-brow culture.

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Biography

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