Video in Different Media Contexts

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Zusammenfassung:
Es gibt zahlreiche Literaturangaben darüber, wie ein Fernsehfilm oder ein Werbevideo produziert werden sollte. Aber welche Regeln gibt es darüberhinaus, die für Videosegmente im Kontext computergestützter Multimediaangebote beachtet werden müssen, also beispielsweise für Filmclips im Kontext eines Webangebots? Wie unterscheiden sich diese Regeln von dem, was für Video und Fernsehen gilt? Die Präsentation stellt die wichtigsten Erkenntnisse zum medienadäquaten Produzieren von Film und Video in traditionellen und ‚neuen' Medienkontexten vor. Entscheidend sind Probleme der Dramaturgie und der Filmplanung. Die Unterschiede beziehen sich auch auf formale Aspekte wie die Filmlänge, auf die Bildgestaltung und das Schnitt-Tempo. Die Unterschiede sind signifikant und können im Entstehungsverlauf dargestellt und rekonstruiert werden; dies soll anhand eines Multimedia-Projekt beschrieben werden.

Abstract:
The increasing importance of moving images in multi-media contexts seems to demand research on the similarities and differences in their use in other media, cinema and television. Empirical data suggests that the different channels change the necessities of how to produce and how to present content, producing video has to be different in each medium. Differences can be found concerning the film length, the design, the speed of editing, the dramaturgy and the content. They seem to be quite contrasting, and to represent a historical process.

1. A CD-Rom

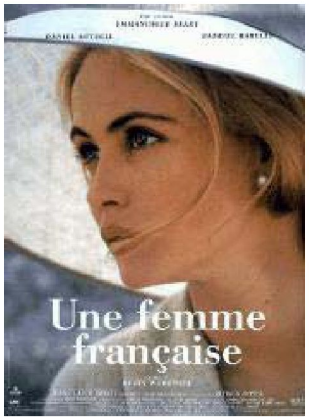
Information is increasingly processed by multi-media products that include moving images and video, especially, to name but few, in the context of cultural heritage, the museum sector, or in the tourism industry, but also more and more frequently in the field of sciences, by biologists or psychologists, or in the humanities.
This presentation will refer to a multi-media CD-Rom that was designed as a guide for German students to the French region of *Lorraine*. It was planned right from the very outset to incorporate video elements to increase interest and memory ability (cf. already Katz/Adoni/Parness 1977, Findahl 1981). It seems to be important to note that these video elements were to be integrated in a multimedia environment; that is, they were small frames and no be seen on the computer as a channel similar to the television set.

When producing these video elements, we encountered some new and very specific problems. First we had to decide on the audiovisual elements we wanted to include. It is clear that it was up to us to produce (at least) the interviews. On the other hand, it seemed convenient to use existing materials produced professionally by tourist offices or from feature films when they were available and adequat. For this reason we faced the prospect of mixing multi-media products with material that had originally been created for different communication channels.

2. The Problems

Thus it seemed to make sense to integrate some sequences from the movie *« Une femme française »* when introducing the city of Nancy. This movie features French history by telling the story of a woman (the *« femme française »*) whose hometown happens to be Nancy. Many important events of the movie take place at Nancy, for example at *Place Stanislas.* This square was named *world heritage* by *Unesco*, and cameraman François Catonné shows it at its very best. Catonné is

one of the leading cameramen of France. His film prior to *« Une femme française »* was *« Indochine »* with Cathérine Déneuve, directed by Régis Wargnier, awarded an 'Oscar' as best foreign language film in 1992. *« Une femme française »*, from 1994, was the next joint Wargnier/Cantonné movie after *« Indochine »*. What could have been more natural than to use *« Une femme française »* to present Nancy?



Pic. 1: advertisement poster « Une femme française »

Before seeking official approval, however, we digitalized parts of the movie to see which scenes would be best suited. When we did this we were surprised to find that the effect was not convincing when viewed on the computer monitor, as was confirmed by literally all test viewers. Thus we found ourselves compelled to do our own filming – but now our curiosity was aroused: Why did Cantonné's material not work on the computer monitor? Our question revolved around theory and application alike, for we wanted of course to know what we should pay particular attention to with our filming.

Further questions threw up a problem which we had with another film sequence, an interview. This sequence seemed to present no problems from the point of view of filming techniques – the picture sequence in fact corresponds as it were to the standard of any similar scene in any television report: when the interviewee spoke, she took up the middle of the screen. For the questions there were cuts. Then the interviewer could be seen on the edge of the picture and the interviewee on the other side. The picture composition was thus now no longer central but bipolar.

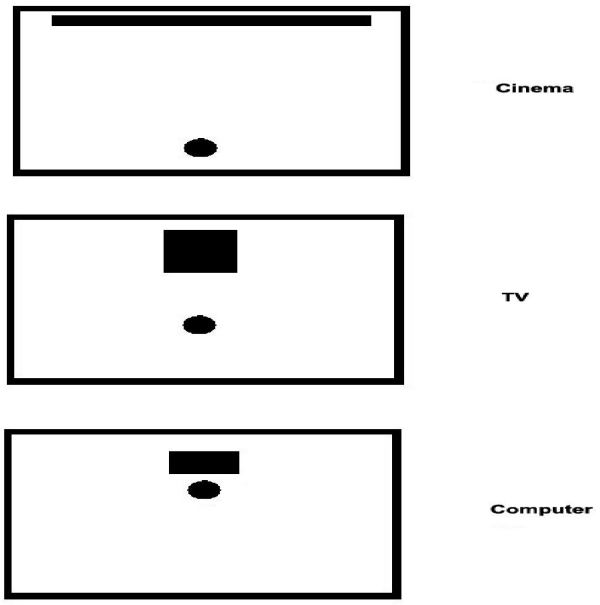
Pic. 2: the interviewee, face close-up

Pic. 3: interview, knee-shot, bi-polar picture

Despite its everyday nature this scene caused difficulties for some test-users of the CD-Rom. What was the reason for this? We conducted different test presentations (12 students, among them six male and six female students aged 23 to 28) partly structured in-depth interviews of about two hours. This gave us clues, which led to the following theoretical conclusions.

3. Research

The cause seems to lie in the very fact that the pictures were not being viewed on the cinema or the television screen, but on a small frame on the computer monitor. In this, two aspects are of special significance: the distance at which the viewers sit in front of the picture, as well as the picture size. As a result of our investigations each application was bound to have an effect on the production of films for the individual media.



Pic. 4: Differences in the user's situation

Since the image on the cinema screen is large and the audience can view it directly, it can be very detailed – it apparently *must* even be detailed in order not to be boring. Crowd scenes and whole landscape shots are therefore characteristic of the cinema. With the computer the frames are decidedly small; in the case of our CD-Rom with the information about *Lorraine*, for example, they do not have quite the size of a quarter of the screen.

This is, by the way, no longer caused by technical considerations, but results from the intention to fit the video picture into a multi-media environment. The text in the frame, a navigation frame, as well as additional information such as supplementary pictures or animations must remain visible as the video sequence is intended as a completion in this context. So it is that precisely one of the most important features of the new media, *the multi-media element*, means that the video picture on the computer-monitor is and will remain only a small window in a diversified, multi-faceted environment.

Accordingly too the possibilities of distraction are great. We are therefore dealing with two effects, which mutually reinforce one another. On the one hand the picture is small and therefore less effective. The users therefore have to concentrate even more on the video frame – but in fact they are distracted even more by the many other kinds of attractions offered on the very same screen. In every case the students questioned found it very difficult to follow attentively the very detailed picture in a small frame on a colourful screen for a longer period of time.

What must also be borne in mind is that there is scarcely any distance involved where the computer monitor is concerned. The reasons for this can again be seen in a characteristic feature of the computer, the possibility and as a rule indeed also the necessity of *interactivity*. The operator

has to click accurately on icons or links with the mouse. Thus it is even the very multi-faceted nature of the computer which leads to a narrowing down of the attention. All the students interviewed without exception have confirmed this. The operators as a rule concentrated their attention on only one area of the monitor, frequently indeed on only one single point. In the video sequences this is unequivocally on the centre of the action alone.

This seems to have been the reason for the irritation of the students over the interview passages. The attitude which the interviewee in the centre of the picture revealed was seen for longer (because the statement was important), so that the users had quite literally 'focused' on them. With the cut they had to re-orientate themselves. Thus they seem to have had their difficulties with the apparently simple jump from a picture centre to the bipolar picture composition.

4. Consequences

How can one react to this? First one should resort to the 'user-friendly media dramaturgy' (Sturm 1984): Here this might mean that the user is prepared for any and every alteration in the centre of action. In principle this is not difficult; suitable methods are, for example, gentle pan shots in the direction on which the viewers are to concentrate in the next scene (that is the solution with the camera) or movements of the main actor to the place in the frame where the new centre of action will be after the change of scene (the directing solution). In both instances, however, a *storyboard* with an exact planning of the respective main visual focus is absolutely essential – a *storyboard* which relates in particular tot the arrangement of the transitions.

In this context a further aspect seems to be of significance. In order to keep the attention on the diversified, multi-faceted computer monitor, the eye has to be constantly guided throughout the whole length of the film – it seeks another stimulus all too easily. There seem to be different reasons for this. Many operators allow different applications to run parallel and look elsewhere, when the visual presentation becomes uninteresting. Many users have multiple windows open and watch different content in different windows. Frequently the operator listens only to the sound of the video sequence. It is possible that subjectively they even have the impression of being able to continue to follow the content. However, when the aim of a video production was to link further information with the visual element (which should, in fact, be its aim) the information cannot be completely taken in – apart from the fact that even the concentration on the sound is limited by the attention to other applications.

What can be done to keep the eye and the user's attention on the picture? The scene has to be simple, as scenes full of details, watched on the computer monitor's small video frame, are confusing. Plain scenes, however, might soon become boring. The best means of keeping the attention fixed on the picture lies in increasing the cutting tempo. This strategy gives the viewer the impression that they must not look away for fear of having the feeling that they have missed something.

Within the framework of our experiments we have made different pictures at varying cutting speeds. One picture was produced to introduce the city of Metz. Here, the average length of a scene was approximately two seconds; in some cases it was even shorter. Once again we had asked the students for an evaluation. To none of them did the clip speed appear too high, not even in response to direct enquiry; all considered it rather suitable or even as a precondition to watching with interest, as was proven in our test viewings with 12 students, lasting (with interviews and comments) about two hours.

Nevertheless, the opinions of the students indicate that video sequences in a computer frame – even after the application of all the possibilities discussed – cannot be watched for very long in a concentrated way. The viewers clearly sense that it is unpleasant to watch precisely one point or at least one small area of the monitor for a long time. This is stressful and at least the students questioned became tired relatively quickly and then could not be made to concentrate on the video picture even by such striking pictures and swift scenes. Our enquiries lead us to suppose that videos with a total length lasting more than two minutes are as good as never ever watched to the end; most simply do not watch one spot in a concentrated way for longer than about one minute, even when the content (even on their own admission) interests them.

Finally, there is one last significant point: the new possibility of oneself responding *interactively* to the video clip. The students frequently made use of the sliding control to navigate on the time axis after what was incidentally as a rule a relatively short time. Most went to the end of the video

sequence to see how the clip ended. It did, however, become problematic when they wanted to go back 'into' the film again. As a rule they did not go back to the beginning: they had already seen that. Now they wanted to avoid boredom and repetition and looked for somewhere around the place where they had first left the application. Mostly, however, they found another new starting point and watched on from there.

The fact that films can frequently not be watched from beginning to end, chronologically, but only in excerpts tends to suggest a rejection of a mode of presentation which is just chronological or concentrates on one point or consequence. The presentation of content should follow the principle of completing variation. Films should therefore be *monothematic.* At the same time, of course, 'monothematic' must not signify 'repetition'. At all costs those operators who watch the film in its entirety must not be penalised. Maybe, therefore, one should rather speak of the complementary (and visually varied) variation.

5. The Results in summarized form

Each medium therefore has its own characteristics; even more: its rules which it is essential to know to ensure an appropriate production suited to that medium. In all we have been able to pick out the following areas in which these differing characteristics operate.

Firstly, the picture size. The cinema picture is large and therefore frequently rich in detail. As said, crowd scenes and whole landscape shots as in historical, science fiction or war movies are characteristic of the cinema. – On the other hand the typical scenes of the television are 'knee shots' and close-ups, as there are poorer possibilities (simply on the basis of the much smaller screen) of being able to present many details. On television, the effects of a large and rich picture disappear and the general impression can even be quite disappointing. This was in fact the well known effect of the television presentation of Stanley Kubrick's visually bombastic film *2001,* for example. – On the computer monitor scarcely anything else but close-ups seem to work – a close-up is almost the only presentation size which is in fact appropriate to the medium.

Secondly, the cutting rhythm. In order to be able to receive, pick up and allow the large cinema image to work, one needs to have time, so long takes are meaningful. In contrast to that – the television. Here scenes have to be much more simple, and thus might soon become boring with long shots. One solution to this effect can quite simply be to include quick shots as eye catchers, so viewers will not switch away. This was not yet known when there were only some few television channels and no remote control, and television was still much more influenced by cinematographic tradition than today. At the very moment when innovations like remote control or rising numbers of television channels came into effect, it became obvious that people turn away if the cutting rhythm did not became faster and pictures avoid boredom. – With the video clip for the computer the more striking picture, cognitively even easier to take in, which, however, also tends to have to be in quicker sequences, is clearly the only alternative appropriate to the medium.

Thirdly, planning of the scenes: Movies tell stories, so filming has to be planned exactly so as to professionally develop and process the film's content. – Historically, television films also presented stories, but later it became evident that transmissions that are typical and adequate for the medium are news, debates and short 'soap' forms of stories which correspond to the viewer's expectations and behaviour (Giessen 2004). Here, however, you have to react very fast and focus the camera's lens quickly on where the action takes place. In a debate, for example, you have to show the person talking; in sports or news reporting, you 'just' have to film what is happening, and it is a little bit like this even with 'soaps'. So it is typical of films which are suitable for television that they are produced more or less spontaneously. – As with computer-based multi-media video elements, new problems arise as there is no distance between viewer (or user) and monitor. To avoid irritations, a shift of the centre of action should be cushioned. Again, it is necessary to plan the visual changes from one scene to another.

Fourth point, the film length: A movie has to be long enough to justify leaving home and paying to get in; you would not do this for five minutes. On average, a movie therefore lasts about ninety minutes to two hours. – Television films (with the exception of those shown in *prime time*, when movies or movie-like films are shown) are much shorter, as the typical television viewer does not spend as long in front of his or her television set; or, if they do, their concentration is less. People eat and talk whilst viewing; after some time they change over programmes. Therefore television

films are much shorter. – Video elements in the context of a multi-media production have to be much shorter still, as concentration is even more limited for simple physiological reasons. Our results show that they should not last much longer than about two minutes.

Finally, the content: Movies tell stories. – Television productions, on the other hand, should accommodate the viewer's tendency to use their remote control and switch from one channel to another, and should even take into consideration the fact that viewers might miss parts – these are not conditions for telling stories. So television should process content that offers complementary and visually interesting variations, enabling viewers to get back easily to the content after their visit to the cellar to look for some more beer. The transmissions to fulfil these requirements are news reports, talk shows and 'soaps' – which in fact tell stories but no viewer needs to have watched more than five minutes to understand what is happening. – According to our research, we assume that, in the context of a multi-media video production content other than short complementary and visually interesting variations are definitely inconvenient.

	Cinema	**TV**	**Computer-based multi-media productions**
The size of the image	LS Large (Examples: Landscapes, crowd scenes in historical, war, science-fiction movies) many details	MS fewer details	CS no details
The cutting rhythm	slow (> 5")	historically: slow nowadays: faster	fast (≤ 2")
Planning of the scenes	(scenic) planning of scenes	no planning! camera reacts and observes (as in news reporting, talk shows, 'soaps')	(formal) planning of visual changes
Film length	≥ 90'	ca. 20' to 45'	≤ 2'
The content	Stories, told in a more or less chronological order	historically: stories, told chronologically – but: remote control and increase of number of channels demand to some extent to renounce context and history. Typical forms: news reporting, talk shows, 'soaps'	It is difficult to keep chronology – focussing on complementary and visually interesting variations Renouncement of context and history

Table 1: formal differences in the production process

6. Conclusion

I want to close with a final remark. When presenting our results, we got some very emotional comments. And indeed, the deeply touching experience of an impressive movie seen at the cinema cannot be achieved in a computer-based multi-media production. You might deplore this; however, this would not be reasonable, for two reasons. On the one hand different media have different functions. You simply cannot compare a computer application with the moving experience of a feature film. Incidentally, for this reason I do not believe that one medium will replace the other, and we do not need to play off one medium against another. On the other hand, the occasion of our research demonstrated why it is important to become conscious of the different media, their functions and their rules. If we knew them when planning our CD-Rom, we should not even have tried to insert scenes from François Catonné – and we should have avoided a disappointment. This disappointment is, of course, an emotional comment, too – but it is obvious that it would not have

done justice to Catonné. Knowledge of the rules and aesthetics of the different media therefore can help to measure the images on the medium they are made for – which means: it can help to lead to an, at least in parts, rational classification of different films in their very specific environment.

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