

## Reading Diary

### *Reality Fiction and the space of Both and Neither*

The readings examine issues of truth, self expression, emancipation, and documentation in contemporary culture. How has social media and its interactivity simultaneously created forms of self expression and forms of subjugation? How has the proliferation of media and the corporate agenda changed the structures of film and television?

The Article *I Media, the Case of Interactive TV*, looks at interesting new ways social media involves the viewer of mass media. Web based discussion groups have become a popular way of socializing and creating intellectual communities investigating narratives found in television dramas. The discussions tend to be smart, lacking neither criticality or creativity. People find solace in their creative criticisms of vacuous mass entertainment. This brings up some very interesting questions whose investigation tells us much about our cultural notions of democracy and dialogue.

An aspect of people being social animals is that we are interested in being noticed, respected, and considered generous and uplifting. We work hard at our skills and if we feel pride in what we have created, we seek a platform to exhibit our creations and document our ideas. This desire is not necessarily self serving since it can be altruistic and emancipating. It, however, can be exploited by those who hold power and, if we are not discerning in what we say with our voices and how we direct our energies, our desire toward meaningful self expression can be co-opted by social powers and used as a way of manufacturing our own consent to repression and injustice. I feel much modern social media encourages us to make exactly this error. We see the absurdity and injustice in our society, yet many of the structures of mass self expression—this notion in itself holds a fundamental paradox—direct our energies of frustration into satirical criticism. It is important to use one's voice, and satire and comedy can have an important role in democracy, but we also need processes of educating ourselves by moving away from the frivolous towards the serious. We need to cultivate wise practices which examine critically the desires and behaviors of technologically and linguistically advanced animals capable of both great deception and violence, and altruism and creation. This process must come to places where we question deeply ideas of dogmatism and other institutional attempts to hold on to certainty and control. We must hold accountable elites who engineer institutions of domination and manufacture our consent. This, of course, takes much more courage than it takes to be clever, funny, and adored. The Colbert report is a brilliantly funny satire of political dialogues and corporate agendas. However, I find a sense of tragedy in this type of entertainment because it is a testament to our disembodiment from very real situations where murder of innocents, poisoning of our planet, and the neglecting and destruction of culture and health have become practices of corporate profit and delusional desires for power.

However, do we really have the courage to face the dark corners in our own souls, to realize the fact that nature is a never ending string of catastrophes, to accept the stinky funkiness of it all? Or do we return to hide in hybrid worlds of stories and histories, documents and fictions, docudramas, and mock-documentaries—worlds carefully designed to be both palatable, popular, and profitable, reducing our intellectual grapplings to an experiences of comfortable impotence?

In this light Werner Herzog's and Cornell West's compulsions and approaches towards and of understanding and grappling with truth has a timelessness currency, where the satirical showman can only exist in the presence of a system he parodies. To begin to understand truth, we must dive in not only with the mind, but also with our whole being. We must enter the darkest corners of ourselves in order to light what is there. We must demonstrate courage and discipline, compassion, and love. By exercising criticism solely without compassion, one

becomes divorced from the corporal, and his conceptions of truth erode in his own hypocrisies. In making films, Herzog does not concern himself with whether a film will succeed or fail, if a script is perfect, or if the character is attractive or ugly. Instead he is possessed by an urge to create and destroy, fueled by a flame of passion. Plato tells us that Philosophy is a meditation and preparation for death. Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras calls yoga a process of ending. The death and endings they speak of are not necessarily physical but mental deaths and subsequent rebirths, processes necessary for intellectual and spiritual growth. Pushing towards and over a void require great effort and courage which can only be fueled by intense passion. When Herzog took the steamboat over the mountain in making Fitzcarraldo, it was not just because he wanted to film a real boat in the rapids of the river on the other side, but to become Fitzcarraldo, to understand and grapple with his obsession of creating something magnificent, for it was Fitzcarraldo's dream that by taking a ship over a mountain he could harvest rubber to fund the building of an opera house to bring the gift of opera to the Amazon. When Philippe Petit danced on a strand of wire stretched clandestinely between the tower's of the World Trade Center, he was not critiquing culture, he did something magical, something beyond ordinary understanding. I feel it is in these corporal acts of great effort, discipline, beauty and generosity that we are moved by inspiration of the inextinguishable human spirit more than we will ever be by the amusements of satire towards a broken system.