

*TV Entertainment***What It Is that Unites  
and Standardises Society?***Media – Communication – Culture*

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Of all the different types of media, it is television that is able to create a kind of community. The German TV preacher Jürgen Fliege puts it in a fairly blunt way: if he wants to be amongst the people and form a community, the best opportunity for this is on television, not in a church. Television has therefore the power to unite the nation in front of the screen and to create a standardised audience. It also has the ability to split the audience into target groups, playing the old off against the young, women against men, people with jobs against the unemployed, the rich against the poor and so on. Television creates an interplay between many variables – division and unity, separation and reintegration, the catering for special interests and the creation of a television nation. It doesn't actually create these variables, but rather reflects, strengthens or redirects them. Through this interplay, the medium is thus able to show society its structure, its social strata and its dynamics. Television also reveals the great changes that have taken place in society – whether concerning its system of values, its conflicting sense of self-image or its morals and goals.

By examining various innovations in television entertainment, I would like to show what sort of new TV trends have emerged and how these enable us to view our society from a new point of view.

Firstly, the individual has been rediscovered by television in a completely new way. The importance of taking responsibility for yourself is currently being emphasised in the economic sector, where, under the influence of neo-liberalism, both waning solidarity and various types individual employment and freelance work (that represent a completely individual struggle) are making a comeback. It is thus no surprise that television has also focused its attentions on the individual.

Only twenty years ago, the relationship between television and the individual was associated with a well-behaved viewer, who would politely choose a particular TV programme, switch (somewhat less politely) from one channel to another to find another programme and then watch it politely to the end. A dividing line existed between the medium and the user, the broadcaster and the recipient, as it were. This boundary was respected and accepted in its entirety by mainstream producers and viewers. It was only the avant-garde and experimental artists who dared to challenge its authority. On one side of this boundary were the professionals, who knew how to produce television and simply delivered what they had produced; on the other side were the viewers, who simply wanted to be shown something or be told a story. Over the last two decades, there is one particular change in the relationship between the medium and the user that has aroused great interest: the challenging of this boundary. It is no longer so clearly defined and no longer separates the television people from the people on the couch in such a straightforward manner. Although the boundary is still very much present, it has become porous – especially in one particular direction. The individual, who used to be satisfied with simply switching the TV on and off, is quite willing to cross the boundary and jump into the TV set. “The medium is the message” has thus been replaced with “the user is the medium”. How did this change come about and what does it mean – both for television and for a society where television is the dominant media form?

The rise of the Internet as a new type of medium played a role in this process, making heads of programming and TV producers nervous due to the similar nature of its user interface. This was something new – created for clicking and surfing, but also utilising a screen as its central means of communication. This wasn’t just something that promised interactivity – it actually made it reality. It didn’t seem to make any difference that media experts were warning against exaggerating the comparison between TV and the Internet, to say nothing of the reports forecasting a merger of the two: the heads of programming and producers became more and more nervous anyway. As TV was at a distinct disadvantage concerning its structural potential for interactivity, many feared that it would be ousted from its position. This in turn provided food for thought for all those wanting to add an interactive modem to the box.

The observation that the border between producer and user has become porous represents only one side of this development – the technical/practical communication based side of things. Another aspect concerns the ability of television as a medium to both gather users into a group and to disperse any such groups. Commercial television (i.e. television that is not state funded) was able to split the previously compact audience into so-called *target groups*, which were still heterogeneous in nature. That is, every member of a target group was supposed to feel as if they were being addressed as an individual. It was all about the *advertisers* who had to produce spots on commercial television – in general, the language used in advertising makes a lot of effort to address its customers in a very personal way. This language was supposed to have the effect of making the individual go on to prove his/her participation in the *consumer community* by the act of buying something the very next day. This type of “individualisation” on television – the private wooing of the individual viewer, so to speak – was supposed to prime them to receive an advertising message and opened up a new avenue in the previously restrictive landscape of TV communication. Although this avenue wasn’t necessarily something new, having always been present as a small loophole, it was now to be

expanded and fully exploited. A flood of shows followed: from afternoon talk shows to reality shows, from casting shows to a whole plethora of game shows. The most infamous of these was Big Brother, a show where the professionals (excluding the technical staff) had been completely removed from the equation, with only members of the public actually playing the game. If the expansion of the advertising blocks in the whole programming schedule hadn't occurred, it is likely that the trend for participation TV would not have progressed so smoothly and with such great speed. It is, of course, no coincidence that the vast majority of these "participation" shows are found on the commercial TV channels.

The motto that springs to mind in connection with this theme is a saying attributed to Andy Warhol: in this media age, everybody can have their 15 minutes of fame. In our epoch, everyone is actually now asserting their entitlement to a scrap of fame. Since we've just described the general framework that has accompanied this development, we can now discuss what the implications of all this have been – for the everyday TV viewer, for society and for television as a medium. While considering the consequences of this development, it is likely that additional factors that have contributed to it that will also become apparent.

Let's begin with the medium itself. When Tom, Dick and Harry suddenly appear on television trying to out do each other with their vocal talents, the element of "professionalism" has been completely removed from the situation. Although such an approach is, of course, questionable, for the producers it means a large amount of money can be saved – stars are expensive but no-names come for free. This type of saving measure has also accompanied the rise of the talk show since the beginning. Although such shows were (and are) cheap to produce, they would never have made an impact in the schedules if they hadn't received such an enthusiastic response from audiences. As our Western secular society moves further and further towards that what we today call the "media society" (which can be seen as a consequence of the breakdown of traditional social connections), the more necessary it becomes for the members of this media society to see their reflections on the screen and to become part of the schedules themselves. The afternoon talk shows and their frank content, which caused a real shock when they appeared a decade ago, are a product of this movement towards a media society. They can also be seen as a functionalisation of the media for local communication, self-portrayal and discussion of personal issues in society. In the 1990s, the screen was made accessible to a kind of *local neighbourhood viewer*, much to the indignation of the older critics and television observers. They had hoped to remove the "irrelevant" material from the schedules such as bickering couples or hopeful singles, but their attempts now came to nothing. This type of everyman television is self referential if the medium and the audience are considered to be one system – not just a system formed by accident, but rather an intentionally created and programmatic one. The masses had now conquered television with their everyday worries. They wanted to watch themselves and their closest friends attacking each other in the studio, or making up with each other or simply airing their dirty washing. This development has not only been irreversible, it has also robbed the medium of a certain amount of status, dignity and respect in the course of its stealthy reduction in professionalism and trivialisation. However, there are also several ways in which the negative effects of this trend have been counteracted. Firstly, newly specialised jobs have been created, such as presenting these popular shows. Secondly, the increased dramaturgic or thematic complexity of some formats (such as counselling shows)

has also worked against this trend. Besides this, we also can observe a gradual differentiation process. Although the *local neighbourhood viewers* are a force are developing further, the *national viewers* of television certainly aren't in decline, even though the decline and/or cancellation of classic formats such as the political magazine is hardly something to be welcomed. While the crisis in political journalism isn't our focus here, is nevertheless closely linked to everyman television and its tendency to personalise.

The developments concerning the *local neighbourhood viewers*, television for the layman and the break down of the schedule into special interest formats (from the weather channel to fishing TV) are not without their supporters. They see the popularisation of the medium and its increased accessibility as a form of democratisation. According to them, "TV you can touch" is a good thing, serving equality and promoting a close relationship with the general public. Arguments such as these naturally come from the side of the producers, who have to justify their strategies and usually refer to viewing figures in order to do this. Although they are not entirely wrong, the dissent voiced by media critics (who have positioned themselves against the producers) must also be taken seriously. The idea that you can have fifteen minutes of fame doesn't, of course, work in reality. The concept of fame is, by definition, a scarce resource that loses its very character as soon as you attempt to turn it something universal. The concept of fame for all exists only in the form of a caricature, a joke, an allusion or a game. As long as the players are aware of this and are content to go home with their 15 minutes of fame, this is not a problem. I would say that the majority of participants, whether on afternoon talk shows, docu-soaps about the lives of driving instructors, police officers on the beat or midwives or on quiz shows like "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" seem to be aware of this: and are playing the game just for the sake of it. The short period of fame is taken on and is quickly forgotten again according to the motto "Sic transit gloria mundi". In this respect, any damage caused by this process is kept to a minimum, despite what alarmist reports might have us believe. Any potential damage is certainly offset by the gain in experience, social contact and fun that this sort of participation television bestows on its protagonists.

So what do these new show formats tell us about the state of society? They tell us that the both consumer willingness, narcissism and the desire for to profile oneself (two areas that are connected anyway) are all things that are taken seriously and served by television. The man who goes to the market not only looks at what's being sold there, but also puts himself up for sale and hopes to be looked at in the same way, flirting with the idea of being for sale and having a price. Television entertainment is very good at satisfying such desires and provides a platform for this process at the same time. The discovery of the individual by the medium in the form of participation/non-professional television can be seen as the equivalent to television advertising within the actual TV programmes. Both of these phenomena are born out of neo-liberalism and the worldwide reorganisation of the capitalist economy that we have all witnessed. Due to the "user is the medium" tendency and the fact that television makes the recipient part of the (broadcasting) medium itself, the medium is able to offer the viewer three things: appropriation, categorisation and the chance to be on to an equal footing with the participants on TV. As consumers and TV viewers we're all the same – we're all characters in the same show. Or, in other words, television is there for everyone and everyone is there for tele-

vision. Television also functions simply as a market place – as an American journalist once said, television is a “machine for selling things”. This machine can also present talents, types and taboos and sell them at the same time. However, the viewers are certainly able to detect the note of contempt in all this. Although they will watch the more extreme forms of participation television (such as the *Jungle Show*, a adventure game show where the contestants have to complete tasks in the middle of the jungle, often involving the more unpleasant forms of wildlife there), they show disgust at the same time. Despite this, it has to be said that while such ego trips on television sometimes damage the reputation of television, the egos themselves seldom sustain any damage.

It’s a different story with the casting shows, a form of participation television tailor-made for young people. On such shows, the fact that fame is a scarce resource is ignored. Everyone (including the candidates) acts as if fame can be achieved through effort alone, just because the attempts to attain it are being shown on television. The rare case of a natural talent without training and experience achieving superstardom and going on to delight the world, are simply presented as normality. In addition to this, ranking fever suddenly grips the nation. Such ranking crazes, which are by no means restricted to television, are one of the most unpleasant phenomena of our media world and are diametrically opposed to the trend towards individualisation in our society (if this trend is indeed something positive). In fact, these casting shows contain a perfidious mechanism which propels unsuspecting young members of the public into a glittering new world and then makes fools of them. Thus it becomes clear that they are simply being exploited by the television folk. This is an accusation that has also been levelled at other television formats. For example, the opponents of talk shows have tried to prove that television producers are responsible for taking advantage of the psychological problems of their fellow citizens and that guests drawn from the general public suffer life-long psychological damage as a result of this. Such charges are exaggerated – there are even studies which directly refute them. However, the 17-year-old singer who sings as a hobby and gives it her best shot in front of an audience of millions is another matter. She is closely related to the inhabitants of another TV format – the nation’s “problem children”, who show us just how badly brought up they are under the watchful eye of the super nanny. Thus we learn that our favourite medium, far from spoiling and dumbing down both children and adults, is actually able to make a valuable contribution to family harmony. It isn’t just that these problem kids have temper tantrums; their tantrums are also presented on television. The fact that this isn’t really in their best interests tends not to be addressed. It makes a huge difference though, whether these non-professionals who appear on television are actually content doing so and are capable of accepting the consequences, or whether they are being forced into the whole thing and are unaware of what lies in store for them. It is obvious that the TV producers are continually trying to redraw this boundary and push it further out. This is not a problem, provided the participants are able to learn something along the way about how to deal with the media. Although this isn’t so much of a problem for adults, it is different matter as far as children and adolescents are concerned, where a certain amount of care needs to be exercised. In the many talks I have given about the media at conferences, I have repeatedly called for the introduction of media studies as a school subject as a way of taking action.

A media studies lesson wouldn’t just teach children how to make films and how to entertain an audience. It would also address the fact that the many of tricks used by the media world are subtly affected or even formed by the demands and necessities of the

world outside it, regardless of any good or bad intentions. There is a tendency in current television entertainment that, as I see it, can be traced back directly from neo-liberal dynamics to the universalisation of the competition principle and which directly shapes the television society. This is something I have mentioned already – ranking fever.

It's like this: normally participation television doesn't just present people plucked from the street who then sing for us or try to guess the right answer – the audience is also very much included in the process. The viewers must rate what they have been shown and are then supposed to rank the performances (which, of course, have been put on by members of the general public) on a scale that not only covers good, very good and excellent but also includes poor and unsatisfactory. The criteria by which they are judged are also vague. This ranking fever could be interpreted as revenge on the part of the viewer, who is seeking revenge on the non-professionalism trend on TV. Moreover, the rating scale is kept continually in flux, so that the participants understand that it isn't about being themselves, but rather about letting themselves be judged by the public. And once the public has realised how much fun it is to rank amateurs, they are quite willing to throw themselves enthusiastically into ranking their celebrities, both past and present. This is how the ranking fever has already spread to Germany's "big names". This development can be illustrated nicely by a rather bizarre show called "Germany's Best", which actually made it possible to compare Goethe, Adenauer and Thomas Gottschalk. In this variation on a British format, the object of the show was to find the most exceptional German of all time. After the viewers were asked to suggest candidates for this title, their lengthy list of suggestions was then reduced to several hundred people, which then formed the basis of many long evenings of TV entertainment. Gutenberg, Beethoven, Luther and Thomas Mann were all on the list, as were colourful showbiz personalities and celebrities from the world of sport and politics. But what is it about casting shows that makes them both so problematic and yet so typical of the current time?

No educated person would relish the prospect of having to compare Beethoven with Thomas Gottschalk and then to have to rank them against each other according to some contrived and highly general set of criteria. Ultimately, it only makes sense to use a common benchmark (according to which different numbers of points would then be awarded) to assess a particular quality if the quality in question has been made clear from the start. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is simply not possible in the case of Beethoven and Gottschalk. Adding Bach, Adenauer and Dieter Bohlen to the equation doesn't make it any easier either. All in all, it would seem as if the only option is to dismiss the whole thing as nonsense. But it is not so easy to adopt this standpoint given the success of such programmes, their broad acceptance and the fact that they are bound to be continued in various different permutations – only recently, a new ranking of the greatest inventions was put together. Instead of shaking our heads in an intellectual, middle class way, we should be considering why this sort of TV silliness is so fascinating and to what extent this fascination both unites and standardises society.

I would say that the crucial element of fun here is ranking in itself. It doesn't matter to either the producers or the viewers that apples are now being compared with oranges. The most important thing is that they can put together a hit list, give points and watch how their favourites move up or down the list. Although such a system is entirely appropriate for football league tables (where the same field of reference is being considered), it becomes completely absurd when used for "Germany's Best". This doesn't seem

to bother most people though – they seem perfectly willing to ignore any such absurdity. They are convinced that it is definitely worth creating a list in which Luther and Rudi Völler compete for the accolade of being the “best” or “greatest” German.

It’s all a very emotional process. It’s just as easy to create feelings of *schadenfreude* as it is to have viewers identify with the winners or feel admiration for them. Simply by calling up and voting, the viewers are able to exert complete control over what happens. We all know the formula, whether from political elections, sport or the stock exchange. Although the rules may differ slightly from setting to setting, the unifying principle remains the same – ranking. The concepts related to it also remain the same: hit lists and charts, bottom, top and middle, winners and losers, competition. The general principle of ranking has even developed an increasing ability to subjugate the people who are involved in it. The word “globalisation”, a term frequently used to describe the current age, refers to nothing more than the universalisation of competition and the worldwide comparison of costs, profits and productivity. When politicians are asked to explain why the gross national product here is barely showing signs of growth, they always bring up the allegedly cheaper locations and cost structures in the Czech Republic or China. Thus, society is expected to accept the fact that it is subject to international competition, in which the usual national standards as well as other external conditions, which we have no control over, come into play. The stock market game also follows the up and down rules, where the investors are actually able to go one step further and influence the trends themselves by anticipating future business developments. The Germans discovered this game fairly late, with many people left less than pleased following the last market crash. In the world of sport however, the viewer is only involved indirectly. The viewer can exert his influence by shouting encouragement or send the market value of particular sporting events up or down simply by choosing to tune in or not, both of which represent a form of power nonetheless. However, all these examples of competitive behaviour and ranking events have a common element which the up and down game is based on – sometimes its called money, sometimes percentage points, sometimes goals. But on the show “Germany’s Best“, it wasn’t just a case of apples being compared with oranges – a veritable basket of fruit was being compared using the same yardstick. The comparison of vocal and dance talents in the casting shows is also something that is problematic and somehow always unjust. As I’ve already said, the audience doesn’t seem to care in the slightest about this and creates ranking after ranking list with a great deal of enthusiasm. Time and time again, they are captivated by the prospect of being able to winnow out the losers, celebrate the winners and see how the national ego is reflected in the winner.

The side of the television ego trip that seeks to unify and create uniformity can therefore be called competition. The individual isn’t just the centre of attention, but rather the focus of a form of attention that measures, rates and in doing so, strives for quantification, ignoring any individual idiosyncrasies in the process. This is the reason why the trend towards a more personal approach in television or the idea that individual should form the focus of interests are both higher contradictory matters. The individual is only put on stage so that he can be purged of everything that is unique about him. I would now like to bring up another current buzzword that didn’t emerge from the world of television, but that is certainly linked to it via the ranking craze: the PISA study. I am convinced that the whole endeavour is flawed to say the least, if not completely pointless. Firstly, the ability to actually compare schools has been greatly overestimated, while the

fact that the determining factors for the study vary widely has been underestimated in a similar way. Secondly, the results actually tell us very little. What do I mean by this? Now, schooling and education actually depend on developing a series of skills such as imagination, creativity, a feeling for connections, intuition, team spirit and resourcefulness. These are all qualities which not easy to measure and very difficult to compare with one another. The recent developments in our education system – from PISA to university and student rankings– remind me of a statement reputedly made by Jack Welch, former chief of the US conglomerate General Electric, “Saying that there are things you can’t compare is just an excuse. You can measure anything”. This statement describes the recent developments in television equally well. And, of course, if you can measure something, then you can compare it. This sort of attitude has been criticised in a particularly interesting way by Reinhard K. Sprenger, the successful author and business consultant. “For many managers, the only things that count are the things that can be counted. With this attitude, they are ignoring that fact that the numbers didn’t just appear at random – someone was responsible for compiling them” He is also highly critical of companies and, at the same time, our culture (including television). I would like to quote him again with respect to this:

*Counting and measuring form the basis for the most original, most rigorous and most exact scientific methods* wrote Hermann von Helmholtz in 1879. He couldn’t have known back then the great significance this assumption would end up having. Today measurement is a cultural technique of the first degree. The motto is measure it or forget it. The idea that you can only work with something that can be measured has been taken on nowhere else more than in Germany. We measure everything that can be measured, and even try to measure things that are inherently unmeasurable. Sometimes, it seems that in companies, measurement is a synonym for the general company philosophy.

The all-embracing trend for measuring things is articulating a yearning for trust, objectivity and indisputable authority. Numbers feed into a post-idealistic mood that only wants hard facts. In the meantime, people reach for numbers in order to avoid complexity – anyone who works with numbers doesn’t want to describe things in a differentiated way. The numbers should suffice.

But is this really true?

The problem with this measuring craze cannot be explained simply by considering measurement itself, but rather by looking at how the things being measured are actually dealt with. The theory behind measurement assumes that numbers are neutral. But the very fact that a number with lots of zero can have such an impact shows us that these seemingly neutral symbols also have a normative charge.

There is also the problem that numbers do not reveal the assumptions that have been made about them. The best example of this can be seen in the attempts to measure human intelligence. The pinnacle of absurdity that has been reached with such methods can be summarised in a simple bon mot: intelligence is whatever the respective questionnaire has been drawn up to measure. Economic data provides another good example: a graph showing that consumer confidence is on the wane does not show the questionable assumptions that had to be made in order to plot it. It is obvious that the average person is not in a position to see this. Graphs and diagrams contain a great deal of implicit theory, making it perfectly possible to conjure up causality from errors in measurement, unsuitable models, superficial analogies and false correlations. Does anyone really notice that it’s all just a series of crooked suppositions, a nebula of numbers surrounded by a

torrent of possible meanings? There is always some sort of significance attached to numbers, regardless of the situation they are being used in.”

That’s what Reinhard K. Sprenger has to say on the matter. Albert Einstein, another great thinker who is celebrating his centenary this year, had this to say about the numbers craze, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”. I am convinced that the counting and ranking mania in the field of television entertainment can be seen as a direct consequence of the counting and measurement fever in our “post-idealistic” economy. In both sectors, a new ideology is spreading that revolves around the seeming objectivity of numbers. This is, in turn, a reflection of the universalisation of competition – a trend that seems inescapable. Education, sport, science, politics and (obviously) the commercial economy, are all increasingly subject to it, as is therefore television entertainment.

There’s another show format also worth mentioning, that has also been propelled by ranking fever, a connection that may not be clear at first glance. I’m talking about the so-called “under the knife” shows such as “Beauty Queen”, “The Swan” or “The First Cosmetic Surgery Shown Live on German Television”. I don’t know whether this type of format has hit Denmark yet, but I certainly imagine so. Although these fusions of the current beauty obsession with the world of television have not been particularly successful with German audiences, they have certainly been subject to lively discussions, whether by critics, television observers or audiences. Such shows generate concern, represent an unpleasant trend, create tension in the society, as well as raising a whole series of moral questions. Are we allowed to alter noses, enlarge breasts or reduce the size of thighs? Should we be doing this? Should be inviting an audience of millions to watch these procedures being carried out? Are we actually able to cheat nature? Or wouldn’t it just be better to act as if it were? Surely any individual who receives such voyeuristic attention is being robbed of his or her dignity? Or are we all just hopelessly superficial and addicted to a beauty that may be only skin-deep? Despite the fact that many of these questions are similar to those raised by the jungle show, the viewing figures for these beauty shows were not so great. Maybe tropical vegetation is more visually enticing than the inside of an operating theatre. Aside from all this, where is the element of ranking here? It’s certainly present in these shows, but in an indirect way. This stems from the fact that one particular attribute is being ignored here, if not being completely destroyed – the uniqueness of an individual face. In its place, a mask is produced, which is then supposed to receive the highest possible mark on a scale entirely based on conventional ideas of attractiveness. I don’t think it’s necessary to go into any more detail here. The face that a person has been given by God or nature is no longer of any importance – instead, a ranking list is once again inserted between the person (mainly women in this case) and their self-esteem. They are willing to bleed for nothing more than a better ranking and fifteen minutes of fame.

I’ve mentioned these beauty shows relatively late on because they provide a useful link to a question that is probably long overdue. We’ve already seen that ranking shows represent an abstraction of particular qualities. We’ve also recognized that audiences often disregard the very different nature of the qualities involved in the selection process– the apples and oranges idea. But despite these observations, some sort of common quality still has to be established in order to enable a (quantitative) comparison to be made. What is it that connects Goethe and Alice Schwarzer? And the eleven contestants on a casting show

and the contestants in the Big Brother house? That's right; they've all been on television. It is this very fact that turns them into stars, which then means it is legitimate to compare them. The ability to appear on television either as a "great German" or simply as a celebrity is the common quality that the entire contents of the "fruit basket" mentioned above shares. This is what unites "Germany's Best" and the inhabitants of the Big Brother house and encourages the audience to set up rankings. In the world of sport, this collective quality, as already talked about, is established in advance (the number of goals and the related points). Ranking is entirely appropriate here – it's the whole point. However, the actual achievements of Schiller or Gottschalk are completely unconnected to a list of the greatest Germans shown on television, only having become subject to the requirements of this list subsequently. The TV produces are proud of this for a number of reasons: their attempt at subjugation has been successful; the ability to appear on television (that it is possible become a television celebrity even if you've been dead for decades or even centuries) has attained an inherent value; that television are particular good at helping people and their problems to receive attention. It is this celebrity status, which television confers on even the worst of the Big Brother contestants, that makes casting shows possible. It also explains that when you now ask a five year-old what they want to be when they grow up, the answer is always the same: a pop star.

*"I've been on TV, therefore I am."* is a message that carries certain implications. As I've already said, the self-referencing reality of television doesn't usually cause any damage, whether to the people who appear on it or the professionals who produce it. But it does damage the medium itself and thus the viewer as well. There is every chance that television will continue to celebrate its own achievements more and more extravagantly and give increasing credence to its own self-referential messages. But this would mean it would be in danger of both losing the power it once had and neglecting its original assignment. Its original power was fuelled by a curiosity for the unknown, the remote or the concealed, which the medium allowed us to witness. Its job was to bring the viewers closer to such new, unknown or distant things, to present them to us and to make them accessible. But the longer the medium persists in navel gazing, the weaker this connection to the outside world will become. For example, when the death of an actress from a long-running TV series is reported on in the news, it is something that should make us sit up and take notice. While it goes without saying that the actress was most likely a lovable and interesting personality (who will undoubtedly be missed by the viewers of that programme), does this justify using the scarce seconds allocated to news to inform the nation of her death? In this case, television has quite clearly confused the nation with the television nation. Cases such as these crop up again and again, particularly, of course, in the entertainment sector. If you are a member of the television family, whether as an actor or presenter, it would seem that you are guaranteed a certain entertainment value. It is a well-known fact that, during the evening peak viewing time, the same TV faces are always being recycled on the various talk shows. The medium seems to have forgotten that it used to have the task of looking for interesting subjects to cover outside of the world of television. But venturing into the unknown and finding entertaining material there is difficult and expensive, and also requires a more traditional artistic and journalistic curiosity. It is, of course, much easier to just get a colleague or a media-savvy politician into the studio and ask them about their childhood. Professionals such as these know how to make the right impression – they don't stammer, they aren't nervous, they know the routine and how it works. Thus, any element of risk is removed from

the proceedings. The viewers are used to the fact that television (particular in the entertainment sector) is now staging a production with itself in the leading role and has apparently learnt to live with this. But caution is advised here – the viewers are always looking for the next surprise. In wanting the familiar and the new at the same time, they make clear how demanding they actually are.

This combination of familiarity and surprise is very much indicative of the current age. Television has to fight on two fronts at the same time, supporting the dominant trends while encouraging the opposing ones. By encouraging the measuring obsession (something that was described by Reinhard Sprenger so aptly as a new ideology of pure facts and figures), television as a medium is contributing to the universalisation of the competition principle. As television seeks (or should seek) to reflect the entire world and accepts (and actually needs) highly individual creative impulses, this is a trend that the medium should really be trying to work against

The medium could use its ability to create a community feeling in order to offer resistance to the omnipresent compulsion for quantification and competition. Although this sort of resistance is already present in dramatic productions, in the field of entertainment, which is my topic here, it is far harder to find. Although competition is a powerful mechanism for both socialisation and qualification, it is not the only one. Recognising and respecting the distinctiveness of a particular quality, the unrepeatable nature of a particular feature or someone's individual character and the need to protect the essence of uniqueness in the individual can have the same effect. That television has discovered the individual only means that the individual is allowed to parade himself on television. It is thus the consumer who is offering himself to the "machine for selling things" as fodder. This is simply not enough. The porous boundary between the producers and the viewers has brought us television based on "the user is the medium" that seemed to be close to the people and to offer interactivity. But this form of television hasn't kept its promise to enhance the status of the individual. These celebrities from the general public (who certainly get their fifteen minutes of "fame") do not need to be individuals, as they are simply to be sacrificed as part of the viewers' ranking games. There is only one single quality that is important here – their status as a camera object, a quality that everyone who has appeared on television demonstrates. In this way, the medium has overreached itself, acting as if it's doing us a favour just by existing. This is clearly ridiculous! If television wants to keep its viewers, to inform them and to shake them, it has to take risks and challenge the zeitgeist. Although this may be difficult in the field of entertainment, it would certainly be worth the effort.

