

Tv-entertainment

Crossmediality and Knowledge – A Research Project

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Entertainment in the media has often been described in negative terms as phenomena which are not serious or not informative or it has become a sort of black box in reception studies containing a wide variety of pleasure oriented or, emotional experiences with the audience. Entertainment on television has undergone great changes during the last decades and is currently far more complex than earlier, today being part of everyday television and including more genres and media platforms than ever. This project intends to discuss new approaches to entertainment in order to better understand the very nature of entertainment on television and it implies 6 empirical oriented subprojects that will explore the nature of different types of programmes.

Framework

The media have currently achieved an absolutely dominant role as providers of entertainment to the Danes. As competition among media intensifies, the ability to entertain has become an essential parameter for survival. In public debate this trend is often considered as a setback for a more rationally oriented endeavour for enlightenment and education. Public interest in media entertainment expresses a silent dissent, however.

The Role of Cross-mediality

This project is planned to investigate TV entertainment whose broad public appeal has made it one of the most important disseminators of entertainment. However, contemporary TV entertainment is no longer one-dimensional as several programmes exploit other, secondary media platforms in order to engage, activate and thus strengthen contact with their audiences. The alternative media platforms are used by viewers to create a number of audience communities rooted in TV programmes. Such secondary media circuits have always existed in relation to TV entertainment, but e.g. the Internet and mobile telephony have strengthened both senders and receivers. The project's ambition is to establish new angles on the experiential dimensions of TV entertainment through the exploration of its various forms, their use of other media platforms and some of the cultural practices connected with audiences' use of entertainment.

Existent Research

Recent Danish and international research in the role of the media as providers of entertainment is characterised primarily by its scarcity and a lack of overall focus. Existing

studies are characterised by a tendency to concentrate on specific genres, typically sitcom and fiction, and the object of interest is rarely the entertainment dimension per se. Furthermore the focus is solely on the TV medium.

In particular researchers inspired by the Frankfurter School have placed media entertainment on the research agenda (Mortensen et al. 1981, Holzer 1973). Taking its point of departure in psychoanalytical, socio-psychological and culture-critical, perspectives this branch of media research has thematised media entertainment in an attempt to define the entertainment aspect as an experiential value in its own right.

The great merit of such early research contributions lies in their insistence on viewing the entertainment media as offering not just trivial pastime activities, but as phenomena that by virtue of their form and popularity hold great societal and social importance. Admittedly, this research was driven by a political and normative interest making receivers and the public aware that audiences by their media use would inadvertently be seduced and oppressed by certain political interests.

New Questions and New Approaches

Our project is rooted in a different conception of the audience, which is seen as active, negotiating and conscious in their reception. Consequently we readopt a questioning attitude, posing the question whether the societal function should be found elsewhere. Perhaps this function would also include 'softer' socialising and identificatory functions that are irrelevant to, or even negate traditional political and ideological approaches to this question.

What unites the different strands of this project is the thesis that media entertainment does more than just entertain its audience; that in some of the more recent forms it contributes to the creation, maintenance, and interpretation of essential forms of social and cultural knowledge. In the latter sense, contemporary TV entertainment is seen to offer important contributions to the active reproduction and development of society by involving viewers and addressing them on their own terms. TV entertainment programmes presuppose and communicate insight into various social strata and lifemodes, everyday knowledge about the handling of domestic chores and social norms for behaviour, as well as insight into contemporary trends and tastes. Such insights are disseminated in a number of different ways, being transformed into knowledge through viewers' active negotiation with the subject matter. This process takes place by individual acquisition and in the exchange of insights with others through various forms of interest, support or experience communities. Our proposition is that by their integration of various, in particular interactive, media platforms in the dissemination, the programmes' capacity to contribute to a knowledge production proper is considerably strengthened, just as knowledge can attain symbolic meaning through the cultural practices in which it is integrated.

In bringing the hypothesis to bear on broadcasting with an ambition to entertain as well as inform, our project will be able indirectly to contribute to a critical exploration of a concept of knowledge which is unresolved or, to say the least, strongly contested. As an example, we might point to the public discourse on, and prevailing political conception of the knowledge concept, which reveal predominantly scientific or market oriented views with strong affinities to the productive forces. All of the subprojects are conceived as empirically based, with a focus on the analysis of concrete forms of TV entertainment. At the same time, our wish to qualify the treatment of TV entertainment

as a knowledge form and practice has led to an association with the theoretically oriented research environment at Department for Philosophy at Aarhus University, where the knowledge society as an epochal designation and its attendant concepts have long been subjected to critical discussion.

Entertainment: A Dual Concept

The phenomena involved in entertainment elude easy definition, a fact which is reflected in the wide variety of designations of the field in circulation. Broad terms such as popular culture, pop culture, entertainment, or infotainment, as well as narrower ones such as fiction, quiz, sports, satire, show, sketch, variety show and games, are in use. Apart from their different foci, the varying characterisations and categorisations reflect an immanent duplicity in the concept of entertainment itself. On the one hand, it may refer to an experiential dimension which would leave it up to the individual whether a given phenomena could be defined as entertaining, on the other, it may refer more specifically to a certain type of content produced with specific communicative and experiential intentions by specific sender organisations. A contemporary view would consider the latter definition to be problematic, as e.g. TV entertainment has increasingly taken on journalistic and documentary features, and are being produced outside what could strictly be called entertainment departments (Bruun 2005, Jerslev 2004). Conversely, other media genres of a more informative character are adopting important elements from entertainment (Hjarvard 1999, McManus 1994) in order to attract and secure their audiences. The project aims at encompassing both dimensions as the subprojects focus in varying degrees on both the production, text and receiver aspect.

Internally, the project is closely interconnected by a number of overlapping themes, which are expected to lend synergistic effects to the project while offering at the same time knowledge that can be of practical use. Expert knowledge on popular culture is thus posited as a kind of cultural capital in specialised experience communities, and the project is expected to generate new qualitative insights into how audiences negotiate entertainment phenomena central to the so-called experience economy. Humour and satire will be analysed and discussed as a communication strategy for the mediation of target-group oriented entertainment as well as marketing. Furthermore, our analyses of the fusion between informative, entertaining and commercial strategies and modes of address should yield essential, empirically grounded insights into the possibilities of this kind of communication.

Subprojects

Sports on TV: Fellowship, Gender and Knowledge

Kirsten Frandsen, Associate Professor

Both nationally and internationally sports on TV has been a popular topic with viewers, direct transmissions from international sporting events in particular being able to attract record numbers of viewers. Qualitatively oriented viewer surveys (Wenner & Gantz 1989, Gantz 1981, Bryant & Zillmann 1983) and textual analyses of the ideological aspects of sports programmes (Rowe 1999) have so far made up the most substantial empirical basis for our perception of the entertainment value of TV sports programmes (Wenner 1998).

Through an empirical qualitative reception analysis the subproject wants to explore the TV viewers' everyday motivation and interest in watching sports on TV. On the basis of a theoretical conception of sports as a ritual game phenomenon (Frandsen 1996, Rothenbuhler 1999, Steeg Larsen & Tufte 1999) the project will explore the entertainment value of TV sports broadcasts covering events of more peripheral national interest. While sport is considered as essentially entertaining by virtue of the unpredictability of the game, the experiential benefit cannot be understood exclusively as a derivative of the particular match and the textual representation of the game and event. Particularly in relation to sports, broadcasters were quick to adopt web page communication, profiling their channel's exclusive rights and offering a number of supplementary communicative services to their audiences. The subproject's initial thesis is that TV sports' entertainment value should be considered in a broader social perspective as the programmes constitute the backbone of various cultural and gendered communities, in which both factual, aesthetical and social knowledge is being updated, stimulated and developed. This takes place mainly through TV and other media consumption as well as through a number of social and cultural practices attached to or derived from such consumption. The project aims at an examination of such practices through reception studies of TV coverage of Danish handball and Danish soccer, whose impacts on audiences exhibit important differences.

Fan Cultures and the Eurovision Song Contest – A Study in Expert Knowledge on Popular Culture

Anne Jerslev, Associate Professor

As a TV entertainment programme the Eurovision Song Contest is among the longest running, most popular and tradition-laden in the history of Danish television. Besides, it was one of the first to exploit the possibilities for interactivity with viewers. Its use of TV polling has recently diversified by incorporating both sponsored and unofficial web pages and a lively Internet debate. As such, TV station web pages have contributed to the construction of the Eurovision Song Contest into a cross-media event. Web debates* demonstrate* the existence of a comprehensive factual knowledge in relation to the programme and the show tradition in which it is embedded, e.g. on the historical development of the programme, both in a Danish and a European context, on Danish Contest hits and artists, on the recurring commentators (in particular those of the Norwegian and British Broadcasting Companies), and on how the programme rates with respect to popularity and quality within the confines of popular culture. Thus there are a number of fan cultures surrounding the programme (organised e.g. in fan clubs such as *Eurofans Denmark*). As with numerous other fan cultures, they distance themselves from the 'ordinary' viewers of the Eurovision Song Contest by the extent and detail of their factual knowledge of the programme. By virtue of this knowledge sub-culture members watch the programme with a discerning eye, expressed on the one hand in their enthusiasm and on the other hand in a critical awareness of the varying quality of the contest shows – it appears that there are vintage years.

By and large, fan research has not hitherto dealt with fan cultures as knowledge banks, a fact to which Matt Hill's (2002) extensive review of the entire research field bears vivid testimony; in his book 'knowledge' is understood exclusively as the researchers' knowledge of their 'ethnographical' subject, and not the specialist knowledge

accumulated, disseminated and discussed within the fan cultures. The subproject will focus on the fan culture as a generator of knowledge. Through a qualitative empirical study of Danish fans of the Eurovision Song Contest, a closer examination will be undertaken of this specialised factual knowledge on popular culture. Some of the important questions will be in what way this intertextual knowledge constructs specific ways of watching the shows; whether fans' knowledge gains importance outside the cultural subgroup; and in what ways expertise in the Eurovision Song Contest is considered a specific form of cultural capital – and finally, how this kind of popular culture expert knowledge forms part of what is considered useful and important knowledge by the fans themselves.

Armchair Travelling: Travel Television Series and the Production of Global Knowledge

Anne Marit Waade, Assistant Professor

Television travel series as genre are a mixture of enlightening documentaries and care-free everyday entertainment along with subtle destination marketing. Its historical roots could be found in the ethnographical documentary film, as well as in various genres related to travel, such as reportage, guidebooks, advertising and travelogues. I will argue that these series produce certain modes of global knowledge: *commodification* of travel and places, *touristification* of culture and cultural differences (e.g., exotic, authentic culture), *aesthetification* of the tourist's ways of exploring (sensuously and bodily) landscapes and cultural differences, *culturalization* of the ethnographic eye and the series' representation of different ways of exploring and producing *the other*, and, finally, a *mapping of the globe* and the series' staging of a certain cartographic eye in which the globe itself becomes a destination. There are three main perspectives in this study. Firstly, it is related to diasporic communication in a broad sense of the word: how mobility, modernity and media together produce and reflect cultural differences and hybrid identities, and at the same time represent homogeneous cultural ideas like cosmopolitanism and nationalism (related to the work of, e.g., John Urry, Ellen Strain, Jonas Larsen and David Crouch). Secondly, the study is related to the spatial turn in media studies (geographies of communication/media geography) and the media's production and reflection of space and place in global modernity (e.g., Joshua Meyrowitz, Nick Couldry, André Jansson, Anna McCarthy, David Morley, Arjun Appadurai, Mike Crang). And thirdly, related to television entertainment and knowledge society, the study explores different kinds of media-based knowledge (emotional, social, aesthetic, cultural, political) and the ways in which audiences deal with these in everyday life. The project is three-phased, consisting of i) an analysis of foreign travel series broadcast on Danish TV, e.g. *Travel Channel/Pilot Guides* and *Michael Palin*; ii) a mapping of Danish television travel series from 1988 until today, related to the broadcasters condition of market competition; and iii) an in-depth analysis of a selection of recent Danish television travel series. From a reception-aesthetic perspective, I will examine conditions pertaining to production and sender position (e.g. production company, channel image, advertiser interest), as well as staging of "the other", ways of travelling, tourist images, tourist attitudes, the role of host or guide, etc. in the series.

“The Good Life” – Lifestyle Programmes on Danish TV

Christa Lykke Christensen, Associate Professor

The subproject will focus primarily on programmes featuring housing, gardening, food, consumption, health and body – collectively designated as lifestyle programmes – primarily broadcast on the two Danish public service channels, *DR* and *TV2*. Their success, as witnessed by average audiences of 800,000, however, is not reflected in media research.

So far, the subject field has been the realm of popular magazines, but it is the intention to pinpoint the effect on the field when subjected to the TV entertainment format, often supplemented by Internet-based web editions. The analysis will involve programmes from the decade 1995-2005, a period in which both tv-stations have made a marked effort on the development of such programmes.

As the programmes' intention partly is educational, questions are raised in relation to the more precise nature of the communicated knowledge, as well as to its staging. Furthermore, its effects will receive attention, with regard both to the individual viewer's perspective and to the larger perspective of mentality history. These questions relate to lifestyle programmes as a specific type of factual entertainment with its more or less evident commercial side effects. The programmes contribute to the maintenance of the conflicting ideals of, on the one hand, a mastery of the practical aspects of life, and on the other, an aesthetical/bodily reflectivity and a vegetating, consumer-oriented hedonism.

The project will be based on analyses of how the programmes establish their particular atmosphere of comfort and unconcern – features well known from the stimulating sensuousness of the consumption sphere. Moreover, the mode of address employed in the programmes will be analysed, taking point of departure in their own premise, viz. the alluring possibility of adventurous experience connected with the possibility of change itself. This construction arises not least from the interplay between the three positions of programme host, experts and viewers, respectively – a triangle staged by way of aesthetic and dramaturgical effects such as camera movement, cutting and musical accompaniment.

The subproject aims at contributing to the general discussion of the media's role in the creation, maintenance and interpretation of central forms of social and cultural knowledge.

Information and Entertainment in TV Commercials

Jørgen Stigel, Associate Professor

Advertising in its origin is an informative genre referring to the factual world. It aims e.g. at informing about differences in the products and services market. As advertising at the same time is an unsolicited address, it is also a player in the market of showbizz and attention making. Accordingly it must also inform the ways in which information is possible under these circumstances. Hence, the information dimension cannot stand alone, and is not representative of the field. To some extent, advertising has always been connected with the catchpenny show and the more spectacular and expressive dimensions of life. Commercials as a genre has adopted comedy with its dramatic tableaux and epic modes. On the whole it has learnt the knack of informing while at the same time

influencing audiences views by entertainment. An aspect of this is seen in how the TV commercial has developed its own mini-formats and narrative universes – just as it has its own charts and favourites with the audience.

Thus the TV commercial is constantly renewing and reinventing the ways in which information can be communicated. In this connection, humour, comedy (and irony) are of paramount importance. The TV commercial has furthermore begun to form its own, often curious, fictitious worlds blending fact and fiction. It constructs distinct, more or less exotic universes with recurring characters – mostly of a comical nature – and plots. This is typically realised in serial concepts, which are continually developed, apparently according to quite autonomous criteria in regard to the entertainment value.

The subproject's intention is to answer a number of questions aimed at such types of commercials with clearly dramatic and entertaining objectives, i.e. the typical dramatic TV commercial: i) Can criteria for, or indicators of, how the entertaining (humoristic, comical, etc.) dimensions of the TV commercial may be blended with informative dimensions, in order that a (partially) informative aim will likely be reached? Or, in an alternative formulation: Can a mixture of indicators be identified to reveal when the entertainment dimension would counteract the information dimension? The question in relation to the overall problematic is to what extent general experience from dramatic forms such as comedy can be applied to the field? ii) The TV commercial is summary by nature, its short forms approximations of the joke or anecdote. It negotiates with audiences' prior knowledge of typical situations and various stereotypes. Consequently: Can criteria be formulated for, or indicators given of the contextualisation and situational presuppositions at play?

The subproject will take its point of departure in a sample of TV commercial covering the period 1995-2005. The sampling will be guided by measurements of TV commercial's effect in relation to a number of essential information parameters, as published in two Danish publications (*Markedsføring* and *Børsens MedieMarked*). Aiming at the identification of possible indicators in relation to i) and ii), results based on a qualitative analysis of content will be collated with results from quantitative effect surveys.

Laughter Communities? Danish TV Satire, 1968-2005

Hanne Bruun, Associate Professor

Since the early 1990s the TV satire genre has experienced an intensive development. In close interplay with the Internet the genre has become a means in an increasingly focused target group orientation undertaken by Danish public service TV entertainment (Bruun 2005a). However, TV satire is not a new venture. The genre has formed part of Danish TV entertainment since 1968 when it spearheaded an attempt by public service TV to offer entertainment of broad appeal, but with a critical, evaluative gambit for political and socio-cultural self-reflection (Bruun 2005b, Hutcheon 1985, Larsen 2001).

The objective of the subproject is to offer a historical analysis of the development of TV satire as an entertainment genre in a perspective emphasising text production and cross-mediality. The intention is to present basic research work in the field.

The thesis is that the ability of the genre to facilitate societal self-reflection and target group orientation is presupposing an increasingly extensive and detailed fund of shared knowledge in producers as well as viewers (Schwind 1988). The necessary contextual knowledge of political and socio-cultural nature is disseminated by the same media

(Meyrowitz 1985, Scannell 1996). But TV satire also informs and maintains media cultural knowledge by its own genre traditions. These genre traditions have established certain norms for its satirical adaptation that are currently supported, developed and enhanced by Internet-based facilities.

The character and development of the genre points to the question of the socially integration and marginalising potentials of TV satire, and to the kinds of discursive communities it can establish. (Hutcheon 1994). Furthermore, the development points to the overarching question of the profile of public service TV's entertainment in comparison with commercial TV systems. A comparative study of the tradition for satire in American TV is therefore planned in order to examine this question.

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