

Caught ***Critical versus everyday perspectives on television***

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There is no denying that television viewing is not what it used to be. Multichannel choice, the alternatives offered by downloads and streaming video on the internet and, last but not least, the opportunity to make one's own television. High definition video cameras are available at reasonable prices; montage software can be downloaded for free. Any amateur who wishes to make television can do so. This has led optimists to argue that we are heading towards 'convergence culture' (Jenkins 2006) and a world in which media content production is no longer the prerogative of media corporations. Clearly, then, we are in need of evaluating what television is about and, perhaps also, of updating our theoretical framework to understand the medium.

In this chapter I will argue that most thinking about television implicitly or explicitly refers to 'the mass communication paradigm'. The mass communication paradigm consists of historically located theories and practices around television as the medium developed from the 1950s onwards. These theories and practices are often in discord. They share the notion that television is typically the medium of mass societies and that there is a centralized source and a multitude of dispersed viewers. In Western Europe, moreover, the state is understood as television's most important guardian and financier, with television a strong means for the nation state to reach entire populations (Gripsrud 1998). Debate in this paradigm often underscores the double nature of all mass media: they can work for the good, and present strong role models or empower citizens, but they can also corrupt (Jensen 1990). That makes the possible effects of television a contentious issue, as well as the medium's social responsibility. All of these elements – mass media, the nation state, effect thinking and social responsibility – coalesce in the mass communication paradigm.

Recent developments certainly seem to warrant a new or extended framework to understand television, but is this true for everyday talk of television? Reservations may well be in order when theorizing how audiences make sense of television. Existing frameworks might still be useful there. Although practices of use are changing, how television is understood may not be changing, or for that matter need to change, at the same rate or speed. While the utopian energy of, e.g. the '2.0' paradigm in media studies (see Gauntlett 2007; Merrin 2009) is unlocking new ways of understanding audiencehood as such. The 'old' mass communication paradigm, of which 'broadcast television' was a central tenet,

appears to have lost little of its heuristic potential in everyday life. That, at least, is what will be argued in this chapter based on two case studies that deal with television as a medium via the two routes of viewing and of making television. Despite and perhaps contrary to critical academic discussion, the mass media paradigm is still relevant to everyday understanding of television.

Paradigms rooted in science and critical thought spread to everyday life. They are, in fact, often encouraged to do so. Foucault used the term 'governmentality' to denote how power and knowledge strengthen regimes in modern society in this way (Dean 1999). Academic thought may thus 'protoprofessionalize' or 'vernacularize' and become a powerful force in the self-understanding and regulation of media audiences. This results in appropriate behaviour, which, in many cases, will be ritualized (Carey 1989). Television was mostly regulated via cultural means. Spigel shows how instruction for proper use of television as a family medium was given in advertisements in popular magazines (1992). News weeklies and later newspapers carried interviews with experts who discussed possible detrimental effects of violence on television for young viewers. Parents were warned not to have their children watch too much TV (Crone 2007). On the other hand, populations learnt to see watching the news as a 'civic duty' with all the ambivalences that implies (Hagen 1994). In exchange for dutiful citizenship, audiences were encouraged to feel that they should insist on professional craftsmanship, and quality standards in television news programmes. Such encouragement was double-faced. It suggests that audiences were in a reciprocal relationship with television producers and could have demands. In reality, the ideology of professionalism enclosed television production within the broadcasting institutions. For example, various forms of volunteer and open access television experiments floundered as they were felt to 'lack quality', both by viewers and, for instance, by local authorities.

Although established frames of reference provide room to manoeuvre in times of change, they mostly do so for powerful players. Despite the fact that new media will 'remediate' older ones, and take on some of their qualities, audiences understand content and technology through those (officially sanctioned) established frames of reference that they have easy access to (Bolter and Grusin 2000). As a result, 'standards' and 'quality' appear to still be meaningful terms whether new or old forms of television are discussed. Indeed, much audio-visual media content is still understood as if it were... broadcast television, *Media Studies* 2.0 notwithstanding.

This chapter is structured as a discussion of two case studies that both deal with the relationship audience members feel they have with television as a medium. The first case study discusses reactions to a local reality soap series. The second looks at a digital storytelling project that was intended to become an internet drama series. In starting from audience material, the chapter follows the old cultural studies dictum 'that we had better (empirically) 'ask the audience' before assuming their interpretation' (Dovey and Lister 2009: 132). It will argue that in evaluating the theoretical and analytical means we have at hand to understand what-used-to-be-television, available critical frameworks will be helpful in contextualizing and sharpening new concepts. Governmentality stud-

ies are an example. Before outlining the two cases, there is a short discussion of critical research and its relation to what, here, is called the paradigm of mass communication.

1. Media 2.0 and the cultural studies perspective on television

Before arguing what is entailed in respecting the *autonomy* of how television is understood in everyday life and how this is a different challenge for critical theory than actual technological or political developments, it should be clear that what, here, is called the paradigm of mass communication is part of a ‘dispositif’ or apparatus (Agamben 2009: 14) that has been severely criticized in cultural studies. A caricature of the mass communication paradigm would point to the strong focus on media effects, the reification of quantitative methods and its administrative orientation. From a critical perspective, there is little to be gained by a paradigm that favours a top-down view of audiences as ‘masses’ and that sharply distinguishes between proper and improper (e.g. dangerous) behaviour. Cultural studies, on the contrary, has argued that a bottom-up perspective of culture as the ways in which we make meaning, is more conducive to understanding how television functions and may effectuate different types of meanings (Morley 1980, 1986).

From a cultural studies perspective, issues of power and regulation are of paramount importance. Therefore, at the current conjuncture, we may need to reassess how broadcast television is still intimately connected with nation-building and the containment of diversity within the nation. Despite ongoing (economic) globalization, we are witnessing a new age of cultural protectionism and a strong decline in enthusiasm for new cultural forms and hybrid that appear to threaten national identity. ‘New’ voices are carefully screened. Conservative populism joins hands with a strong sense of cynicism and distrust. Such historical circumstance will cast its shadow over how television is understood. It is not unlikely that the nation-building quality of the medium will be more strongly revered as a result. As this is part of how audiences historically came to television, it may well pay to closely examine how, from an audience perspective, ‘broadcast’ television had and has its uses and pleasures. How and why audience came to love television as a medium, and negotiated its power remains an important and relevant question today that needs to include the type of knowledges that were deployed in this process. Here, I am referring again to the mass communication paradigm. It is not unlikely that exactly this way of thinking about the medium may help television survive the broadcast era. Beyond technologies of dissemination and production and beyond the family set in the living room, the paradigm of mass communication still offers ‘programming’ (the set menu that as a viewer one does not need to think about), ‘liveness’ (intimately connected with maintaining a sense of the national, e.g. in sports matches) and even particular types of narrative in national news programmes and in indigenous television fiction. Instead of focusing on new media forms and cultures, critical cultural studies ironically needs to pay more attention than ever to mainstream thinking about TV.

Coming from the tradition of cultural studies and qualitative audience research, I sincerely hope that 2.0 convergence culture will come into being and materialize into new, more open cultural practices. The 2.0 argument posits that if and when individuals truly start using the new options open to us under the rubric of ‘convergence culture’, a significant counter force may emerge against the media industry. Henry Jenkins foresees that media corporations will cease to wield an absolute form of control (Jenkins 2006: 18-19). Likewise, Jeff Jarvis, recently argued that brand integrity for instance is crucial to enduring commercial or public success and it is in the hands of consumer communities (Jarvis 2009; Jenkins 2006: 86). Integrity here can be taken to mean organizational reflexivity and responsiveness to users who are seen as partners, rather than as an anonymous entity from which money can be made.

This is romantic idealism. In practice, there have not been significant shifts. Despite the increase of media literacy and the availability of cheap video editing software, audience members have not moved in on television production (Janssen 2011). Young adults still watch significant amounts of hours of television.¹ Television producers interviewed by Janssen (Ibid.) in the Netherlands feel little need to open up production practice to audience members. Children’s programming offers some examples of changing roles for television producers and more (controlled and supervised) initiative from viewers. In a first sketch, Berriman (2009) concludes as much for the BBC programme *Bamzooki*, which has firmly been repositioned as a ‘multimedia’ production, rather than a television programme. Peters looked at a Dutch public broadcasting programme based on uploads made by children themselves and sees only a very small number of really interesting short movies (Peters 2011). While Jenkins offers (inspiring) examples of viewer and user initiatives, they appear to come from exceptional individuals, rather than from ‘the general audience’.

It could, of course, be the case that television has a stronger bulwark of professionals than other media and that it is just a matter of time before production relations are rewritten. Experiences in the world of game development (Nieborg and Van der Graaf 2008; Humphreys 2008) suggest otherwise. Even in the game industry, characterized by its tight bonds between gamers and the publishers and developers, new relations of power and dependence have not emerged. While, in many ways, the game industry is open to initiatives and the skills of gifted individuals, these individuals cannot really hope for more than to have their idea for a game or software improvement taken into (commercial) production. It is highly unlikely that they will reap much profit from this. While, evidently, within the gaming world this type of recognition is felt to be worthwhile, it can hardly be understood as a form of empowerment, such as claimed by media optimists.

To believe in empowerment is a good thing. To see possibilities and openings for other social, cultural and economic arrangements is surely of immense importance. This revolutionary idealism, however, is not shared broadly. 2.0 media optimism overlooks that it is exactly the ‘mass’-ness of the mass media which make them exciting and of interest. The two case studies below will show that they are seen as a platform for and a place to check stardom and success, and, more mundanely, as a representational space where group identities and reputations may be either empowered or undermined.

2. The mass communication paradigm in its protoprofessionalized version

West Side

Two Dutch case studies may offer a more concrete sense of what is meant here by ‘the mass communication paradigm’. The first case is of local reality soap. In 2006 and 2007, the city of Amsterdam co-financed a television series, produced by the regional Amsterdam television broadcaster AT5 and televised both on regional and on national television (AT5 and NPS in 2006 and 2007). The series, called *West Side*, was intended to defuse interethnic antagonist feelings in the city, which it was feared would come to a head after the murder of film maker Theo van Gogh by a fundamentalist Muslim in 2004 (Buruma 2006). *West Side* was one of the many initiatives that make up the city’s ‘We Amsterdammers’ social cohesion programme to improve multicultural contact between citizens. In fact, *West Side* fulfils this function in a rather provocative way. The series portrays four families, as befits a soap, all four with a different background: one family is Moroccan, one Turkish, one Dutch, and one Surinamese. They move into the same block of houses because of urban renewal. Tensions regularly rise high, interethnic prejudice is thematized head on. The style of filming and the use of amateur actors and improvised dialogue give the series a strong and, for some, an initially confusing ‘reality’ feel. The content is sheer soap opera: tears, arguments, sorrow, and happiness all have their place in a world centred on the four families.

During the two seasons (2006/7 and 2007) of *West Side* that were televised,² a multi-ethnic team of student-interviewers spoke to more than 200 Amsterdam citizens in the street, half of whom were non-white.³ Approximately 100 individuals took part in focus group and in-depth interviews. Of these people, a little less than half was non-white. The 20 forums on the *West Side* website (over 800 postings) were also examined. Overall, the various ethnic backgrounds were amply represented. We interviewed roughly the same number of men and women. (See Müller and Hermes 2010).

Evaluation of audience reactions to the show provided an unexpected number of unsolicited comments about ‘the media’ as a whole. In fact, ‘the media’ were a subject that respondents felt much more comfortable talking about than the series or citizenship in general. Clearly, as a topic, ‘the media’ allowed them to take up the position of lay experts. Moreover, the link between non-fiction media and citizenship, which appears endangered by the decline in newspaper usage and by the hybridization of fiction and non-fiction genres, is often made by our Amsterdam informants. Not only is it the case that the media and certainly the content of popular media are everybody’s domain, there is a strong sense that the media have an obligation to represent ethnic and cultural groups in a fair and correct manner.

Muslims, that arouses more sensation, they write more about them because it sells more (Peter, white, aged 32).

The media create an image of foreigners as violent people (Erdinc, Turkish-Dutch, aged 24).

The media, too, want us to pigeon-hole people, and that is exactly what we do (Janis, Surinamese, aged 23, group interview).

The problem starts with the government; they don't know what to do with the foreigners. It's also the fault of the media that the foreigners are shown in a bad light (Italian-Dutch woman, aged 32, street interview).

Such a pity that those Moroccan boys are shown in a bad light again. There is a Moroccan family just around the corner here, really, exemplary people. If that could be shown, just for a change, but no. (white Dutch woman, 40, street interview).

But the Turks and Moroccans always are in the news in a negative way. Whether they have done it or not, every time they are portrayed negatively. The same goes for the Antilleans (Wouter, white, aged 30, group conversation).

It has something to do with the way in which the government and the media depict foreigners, migrants – I hate that word 'foreigners' (Mohammed, aged 32, Egyptian-Dutch, in a group interview).

I live in the Diamond neighbourhood [in Amsterdam]. Last year, there was so much fuss about it in the newspapers, but to be honest, I've never had any trouble. Moroccan boys were supposed to terrorize the neighbourhood and pester people until they left and so on. But I've never felt unsafe here. Not even after a night out, riding my bicycle home. As it happens, I read in the newspaper last week that the Diamond neighbourhood is safe again. Yoo-hoo! Ha ha, as if it wasn't safe already (Meike, white, aged 22).

It could well be the case that the provocative style of *West Side* suggested negative comments about the media in general for those respondents that had seen the series or saw an episode at the start of a group interview. The same mechanism, however, was seen to apply in street interviews with Amsterdam citizens who had only heard of the series and in 'mixed' viewer/non-viewer focus groups later on in the research process (in which we did not show an episode of the series but allowed the group to talk about it more freely. The series was better known by that time).

It is clear that condemning the media in a group interview provided a safe conversational option. For a long time, it has been customary to speak negatively of the media, rather than positively. The chances of being contradicted or making a bad impression by lashing out are slim. What we see reflected in the interview material might be the classical silencing spiral effect (Noelle-Neuman 1974, 1993). Viewpoints that fail to gain approval are marginalized and disappear. More likely, it signals a change in the codes of everyday talk about the media. From 'the window on the world', and positive expectations in television's early days, codes seem to have changed to cynicism. In the case of a television series

that is intended as an instrument of information and consciousness-raising, it is important to realize that citizens will understand a television show using these everyday codes, regardless of the style and content of the series itself. What we have here, then, is an interesting mix. On the one hand, media literacy is best shown as cynicism and disapproval of (commercial and sensationalist) media strategies. On the other, there is also strong evidence of one of the basic tenets of the paradigm of mass communication, as introduced in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Among informants, the view is common that the media have a duty to represent all social groups equally and truthfully. Such a duty presumes centralized media organizations that can be held accountable.

Stronger ‘proof’, perhaps, of the mass communication paradigm was in the widespread, if mostly implicit use of another central notion, the concept of (role) socialization.

Terrible, really terrible! I think I saw the first episode. I do really hope that foreigners will not think that all the Dutch are like that [racist] Mimi and that husband of hers. (street interview, white Dutch woman, 40)

The media are causing a lot of prejudice (Lianne, 26, white woman in group interview).

It is so exaggerated. Really, they shouldn’t show these images. They will have a negative effect. This not how it should be (Sara, Iranian, 22 in group interview).

The media should concentrate more on positive images (Mo, Iranian, 27 group interview).

The understanding that the media are a strong socializing force in society was broadly shared, as was the notion that this should be used to positive ends. Somewhat naïvely, it was widely believed that good media examples would be followed. In such cases cynicism does not come into play. When speakers suggest that negative representation and stereotyping will have serious social consequences, they do two things. They suggest that they understand the power of the media to shape social reality (and socialize us) but also that, because they are aware that this could happen, it will not happen to them but only to less-informed and more naïve others.

Davison (1983) called this ‘the third person effect’ (TPE). Whoever is capable of acknowledging the effects the media might generate, recognizes these and is less in danger of falling for them. According to Perloff (1999: 366): ‘Self-perceived knowledge may lead individuals to believe that they are immune to message effects, whereas others are more vulnerable’. ‘Others’, by contrast, do run a risk because they are unaware of the danger. Perloff adds in his review of ‘third person effect’ research that:

[w]hen messages are perceived as desirable, advocating outcomes that individuals perceive will benefit the self or agree with philosophically, people are not so likely to exhibit a TPE. Under these conditions (and perhaps also when messages are of high professional quality), participants will admit to being influenced (Perloff 1999: 369).

Issues of media influence and effects make up an important part of the mass communication paradigm. What happens, however, when media content is seen in a more favourable light than *West Side* was (or media representation of non-white Dutch in general)? If the paradigm of mass communication is on the way out, and a media 2.0 paradigm is taking its place, surely we would, at the very least, find a heavily nuanced version of the conclusion offered by Perloff; namely, that informants in cases of positively evaluated content would also understand themselves as being influenced. Such a conclusion offers further proof of the wish to recognize not just the power but also the *authority* of (mass) media. If, on the other hand, you see yourself as an active participant in practices of media use and of media production, would that not entail understanding media texts as voices in dialogue, rather than as an authoritative source of truth and enlightenment?

Meeting Point Tangiers

A second case study may shed more light on the self-understanding of audience members in relation to television. This is a participative design project in the general area of digital storytelling. As a project, it was inspired by media 2.0 notions. Within our team of researchers we call it a 'civic research' project, akin to civic journalism: by, for and with all parties involved (Hermes 2006).⁴ In this case, ordinary young people we contacted via a sizable internet community called Marokko.nl, became script writers for an internet soap series that would also take on current affairs and social issues – a telenovela really. While we had hoped for them to also be actors and media producers, this never happened. Their fantasy was another one. They hoped for the show to become a success, for themselves to be famous and for the 'message' of their internet drama series to be a significant force in the acceptance of Dutch Moroccans as just another kind of ordinary citizens. 'I would so like to have a series that has people say: yes, they are Moroccans, but you hardly notice that they are' (email from one of the writers' group, 2009).

As in other digital storytelling projects (Lundby 2008), our project focused on identity and representation and on community building. Again, like many others, we may have fallen into the trap of unwarranted optimism about the possibilities offered by the new media (Pajnik 2005). The idea was to produce an intercultural internet soap series for the Dutch-language internet community Marokko.nl. Marokko.nl then counted a membership of around 150,000. On average, on a given day up to 50,000 members were online. The community offers an enormous variety of subjects from politics, education and Islam to 'the best Moroccan weddings' and the 'story corner'. The story corner consists of installments of long-running series and short stories written by community members. It is one of

the best loved areas of the site. Self-chosen nicknames of people posting messages and their discussions suggest that the community draws in what is often called an 'urban' mix of mostly younger people, among them a large number of Dutch Moroccans.

Over the course of three years, I observed attempts of our small team to draw in and connect with a group of writers, all active in the Marokko.nl 'story corner', to build characters, storylines and a script of such quality that it can be produced. While ambitions were fairly low at the start, they changed over time from a wish to do a series just above the level of amateur video to professional television. These ambitions were fed by the internal dynamic in the group of writers that matched their level of excitement about the project, and the will to work hard for it, with an increasingly strong wish to see it screened for a large audience. In turn, one of my colleagues, a researcher who doubled as writing coach would use these ambitions and the small steps ahead we made in negotiations with a production company to keep the writers going. Drawing in new parties, first the production company, then a professional scriptwriter paid out of a grant, then a public broadcasting organization, necessitated a continuous rebalancing and management of expectations.

While the research team felt strongly about the control over the series by the writers and the community, Marokko.nl, the writers themselves were far less keen to understand the process as one of a struggle for power. Although they had initially voiced the wish to redress the negative representation of Dutch Moroccan youth in the media, the possibility of seeing the series on national, broadcast television, gained a life of its own. They became, in a way, hypnotized by the machinery and the magic of the mass media, their initial disdain and criticism of national broadcast media all but forgotten. The issue of control over content was no longer discussed.

Achraf, for instance, one of the core group of writers, was reassured about the project when the professional scriptwriter was hired to teach a masterclass for the writers and to produce with them a first draft to be taken to a public broadcasting organization. The following are extracts from interviews with the core team of writers:

Since Dick has joined us, I feel more confident. I think that can turn it into a success. [...] because Dick has a name. (Achraf).

Most of all, Achraf is a realist who hopes working on the series will open doors for him. 'It is a good opportunity to meet people who do things in film. I'd like to develop as a scriptwriter, but what I really want to be is an actor. This project might be a good bet to do so.' Later on in the interview (conducted in 2009) he qualifies: 'It is an important topic of course, for the project. The way Muslims are branded as one thing, and the way they really are.' He does not hold high hopes for reaching problem youth:

Whatever our message in the series, it could never be strong enough. It does not work that way. That is what I think at least. I have never seen a film that

had a message so strong that it totally changed how I think about things. And if I don't have that, fat chance that that would happen to those youth who ride their scooters and destroy bus stops and things like that. Plus, I don't think this series is only meant to have a message. It should be entertaining. It should be fun to watch. And maybe it'll work for others, in the grey area, as it were; who hear that it is a project by Moroccans with Moroccan actors. Maybe it'll do something for them.

Khalid is more of an idealist. He describes the project as an attempt to bring positive news and not just about Moroccans or about Muslims to the community and everybody else who is interested. 'There is so much negative news.' Like Achraf, he feels there is a need for a big media organization for the series to be a success, and he, too, is in two minds about the power of the media to change people. He suspects that negative representation has a stronger effect than positive images.

Noura is by far the strongest personality on the team. She understands the project to be unique because it will tell a story from an inside perspective:

Marokko Media (the Publisher of Marokko.nl) has chosen to have this story written by people who are in the middle of that story themselves, who experience it daily. That is unique of course. And I do think young people will recognize that. It is not a top down tale. It is really bottom up, accessible. It is as if I can tell my story and share it with tens of thousands of others because there are so many things that are the same. What we are working on now is what connects young people. Questions about: who am I, why am I this way, how did I get to be this way? [...] Questions that all young people have really. Young people from specific backgrounds or cultures really. We are trying to mix them. That remains the point of departure for the series. We mix and try to show the best of both worlds. We want to show what connects people, not what divides them.

Noura's vehement plea for a positive outlook and really mixed storylines, characters and cast, originates from her own criticism of the mass media:

It is the dominant media. Really, you only have to turn on the TV and lots of crazy stuff is directed at you. It is television really. I remember when I left Morocco ten years ago, we had one foreign channel, with foreign movies and everybody was fascinated by this Mexican soap series. It was the only thing that was imported. And then we got a dish and everybody had thousands of channels. A revolution really. The Music channels came. Also from the Middle East, such as MTV. There are also Middle Eastern varieties. And suddenly the whole look in the streets changed. Literally. People started dressing like the people they saw in clips. That is what I mean. The media are so influential. Unbelievable really. It is as if we are colonized, if you want to be part of society. You have to think in a certain way. As prescribed really. It is like a secret message. All the media, every movie, every ad has a message. The better your make-up looks, the more you'll be accepted. If you are slender, and you

look good, then you are welcome. If you are just a bit overweight, you are a lazy good-for-nothing, who doesn't [...] you are looked at in a different way.

Those who oppose these images are made to look like crazy people. We are a colony, really. You don't consciously think why would I want to wear the same dress that I saw on TV, you just think: I could try that. And then they've got you. People are lazy, they don't think for themselves. Easier to do what all those others are doing. You see that more and more. People are so easy to influence.

Marukh, who, like Noura, wears a headscarf, is less strident in her views but just as ambitious. Apart from writing stories for the web community, she is writing a novel. She primarily felt that it was a huge honour that she had been chosen. Like Achraf, she hopes that being part of the writer group will boost her career, in her case as a writer. 'It really is a very good way to gain experience.' As with all the others, including Nouria, the main character of the series is the one she feels closest to. He has been devised as a journalist-to-be. He is an ambitious truth seeker whose blog, called Faysal's News, is the way in which the series will address a range of issues, including social and political ones.

Marukh: The thing with Faysal is that he has aspirations. And that is what I see in myself. I would not mind becoming a journalist.

At first sight, these interview fragments present a mixed picture and a range of near incompatible notions about the mass media. In all encounters, however, what is most striking is the awe inspired by the mass media, whether negatively or positively. In the long process of getting pilot episodes made, it was the promise of a big audience that kept the writers going. In fact, scepticism and cynicism about the media and media influence, and about the gullibility of media audiences went hand in hand with the desire to have a real broadcasting organization take on the script. Indeed, most everything that was said about the (mass) media fits in with 'protoprofessionalized' versions of the mass media paradigm. Apart from Noura's insightful description of a series built out of the experiences of young people themselves, there was no reference at all to a sense of agency or ownership that could be recognized as central to the convergence culture paradigm. In the meetings we had with the production company and the broadcasting organization, the writers would frequently not show up, even though they had been invited and consulted about strategy. When they did, they would often not speak at all, and function mostly as icons of an audience that Dutch public broadcasters would really love to reach. Because that, of course, from the broadcasters' perspective, is the real problem. How to grab the hearts and minds of young viewers who lead the move to internet-based audiovisual news and entertainment. Who, perhaps, are slightly less easy to 'catch', than Noura darkly predicted.

3. Conclusion

The two case studies presented here are meant to illustrate an unexpected state of affairs. While television is changing, technologically and culturally, and critical scholars point to a whole new way of using and thinking media (Media 2.0 or convergence culture), in everyday life relatively old-fashioned notions of the media rule. I have used 'mass media paradigm' as a catch-all phrase to denote the entire complex of knowledges, practices and rules that came into being in the twentieth century and converged on television. The mass media paradigm has been, and still is, highly effective; so much so, in fact, that rethinking television or thinking beyond television (the broadcast, centrally produced and disseminated medium) might well be compromised from the start.

When the proponents of the media studies 2.0 discussion advocate that we find suitable terms to understand current changes in media technology and media culture, they appear to argue from a completely different understanding of today's everyday media use. Neither our amateur television producers, nor the viewers that were interviewed would agree. They did not feel in need of new terms or notions to give meaning or legitimacy to what they are doing. There is no urgency in everyday life to find new terms or ways of talking about television. The appropriate rhetorical question here, is whether media critics should leave the situation at that and accept that this is how television is thought about? Perhaps not. David Gauntlett borrows Ivan Illich's term 'convivial tools' to clarify what he feels media theory should be able to accomplish (in everyday life and elsewhere), which I, in turn, will use to suggest that critical audience research is in something of a conundrum. How, from a critical perspective, are we to meet the demands of the current time for strong and empowering ways to think about the media? Given that the paradigm of mass communication does not, by my reckoning, meet these demands.

A convivial society should be designed to allow all its members the most autonomous action by means of tools least controlled by others. People feel joy, as opposed to mere pleasure, to the extent that their activities are creative; while the growth of tools beyond a certain point increases regimentation, dependence, exploitation, and impotence. (Illich 1973: 20, quoted in Gauntlett 2009: 156).

It would be difficult to find standards by which the paradigm of mass communication hands anyone a convivial tool. Fear and distinction appear to be its main mechanisms: fear of the possible effects of viewing (too much) television, and the means to project that fear onto others (the third person effect). Even when it comes to issues of representation, it is a discursive system that encourages a system to hold distant others responsible, rather than take responsibility themselves. Of course, that is also what makes it a highly comfortable mode of thought: beyond fairly easy forms of criticism there is not much required of a viewer to establish herself as a discerning individual.

The audience material presented here presents a mix of textual literacy, scepticism and only the easiest forms of media criticism. If there is a sense of ‘ownership’, it is an ideological form that pertains, strangely enough, to broadcast television and the standards set both by national television production and American quality series, rather than any more real or material form. The fact that nationally made series (still the best watched in the Netherlands, as is the case in other non-English speaking countries) fall short of ‘quality TV standards’, appears to reassure rather than upset informants. As if a medium that does not do too well is easier to ‘own’ and less of a threat. Noura’s criticism was really exceptional, especially because she includes herself in it. ‘As if we have become a colony’, she said. In almost all other cases, informants and writers tended to be critical of media content and representation, but felt they were not at risk from it personally. If anything, our writers and non-white informants felt at risk from the effects of mass media representation on other people who would not be able to see through it and understand it as a sensationalist falsification.

As long as audiences take up Archimedean positions – outside, that is, of the field they discuss, neither tainted nor affected by it – it is hard to see how reflection on the choices we all make in viewing and talking about the media, in turn drive media production. The mass media paradigm thus makes co-optation of basically enabling technologies easy for corporate players who are able to guarantee the kind of ‘quality’ audiences feel they have a right to expect. The logic of broadcast media is to both please and surprise audiences, who are best pleased if they can maintain a balance between knocking down most of what they see (since that secures their own position) with an occasional exceptional moment of good television to produce as proof of their own discernment. Since there is hardly any sustained discussion of media texts other than in the academy and a few select discussion forums, discernment never has to be put to the test. That leaves only the option to follow in the steps of the paradigm of mass media and to use popular media with new types of advice and challenges to win over television viewers to a type of viewership that is not especially demanding of their own discernment but does invite them to challenge the industry. More and better television can be had.

Notes

1. Figures include watching digital television via a decoder or streams within a week from the original broadcast moment, DVDs, other recordings and downloads are not included. Schols, M., M. Duimel and J. de Haan (2011). *Hoe cultureel is de digitale generatie? Het internetgebruik voor culturele doeleinden onder schoolgaande tieners*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
2. This material was collected for two projects in which the Research Group Public Opinion Formation of INHolland University was a participant (in 2008 the name of the research group changed to Media, Culture and Citizenship). The first of these is a project of the Amsterdam Centre for Conflict Studies (Amsterdam University) commissioned by the municipality of Amsterdam. The second project is a collaboration between the Centre for Popular Culture (Amsterdam University) and the Research and Statistics Department of the municipality of Amsterdam. See Mueller and Hermes (2010).
3. See Dyer (2001) for the merits of defining ethnicity as white versus non-white in order to reflect dominant power relations.

4. The research group's key members were Christa de Graaf, Robert Adolfsson, Pauline Borghuis and myself.

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