

The changing meanings of popular culture in European Public Broadcasting

Scientific report ESF Exploratory Workshop, Amsterdam, June 12 – June 15.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ESF exploratory workshop on *The changing meanings of popular culture in European Public Broadcasting* was held in Amsterdam, June 12-15, 2002. There were twenty participants from seven Northern European countries. The group consisted of ten women and ten men, both young and experienced scholars, with the age group 40-45 dominating.

The overall theme was how popular programming could be incorporated in public broadcasting while still maintaining public standards such as quality and diversity. This was examined from four different angles, as a result of the specific content and approach of the submitted papers:

- Which historical continuities and disruptions can be recognized in the current popularization of public broadcasting?
- How have discussions of quality in public broadcasting been articulated with popular culture?
- What is the public relevance of popular genres like sports, reality and drama for public broadcasting?
- What are the consequences of popularization for the public genre par excellence, television journalism?

Workshop participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the papers, the presentations and with the constructive and congenial discussions. The workshop will lead to two follow up projects:

- a special issue of the European Journal of Cultural Studies is being prepared
- a collaborative research projects on the meanings of different kinds of television awards for professional and audience discourse about the quality of broadcasting is being set up, with the intention to submit a proposal to the European Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences of the ESF.

The workshop was co-financed by the Centre for Popular Culture of the University of Amsterdam, and the Dutch broadcasting organization TROS. The latter invited the participants to dinner and to a meeting with the hosts of the Dutch adaptation of the popular television format *Have I got news for you*.

2. SCIENTIFIC CONTENT

The workshop addressed the question how public broadcasting in Western Europe has incorporated popular programming to face the competition of commercial broadcasters and new information and communication technologies. It was aimed at examining the public qualities and values of popular genres and develop the public standards they should live up to. In the meetings considerable conceptual work was done on the core themes: public broadcasting, the ‘popular’, and quality.

Broenink discussed public broadcasting in his paper in the context of the high-low culture divide and contended that public broadcasting has primarily been framed as an instrument of high culture. Ursell argued in addition that this has prevented the development of an independent television-aesthetics. Instead aesthetic criteria from the arts, literature and film have been applied to television which denies the popular a place of its own within public broadcasting. As Van den Bulck argued in her paper the popular always functioned to promote a higher ideal in public broadcasting, it was never considered to have a value in itself. In the Netherlands, for example, drama carried until recently the imprint of the particular religious or ideological background of the producing broadcasting organisation. Nowadays, public broadcasting is engaged in a period of transformation, with deregulation, commercial competition, budget cuts and ICTs challenging its legitimacy. As a result, popular genres seem to have gained importance for public broadcasting, with sports (Rowe) used as a vehicle to maintain a central position among audiences and in national culture. Public television journalism is looking for ways to popularize their content while maintaining its traditional image of respectability and thrustworthiness. The paper by Lunenborg and Strohmaijer addressed this theme in particular. Biltreyst and Syvertsen explored the options for public broadcasting institutions to redefine their missions in the context of changing programming demands and competition. For Syvertsen it is necessary that public broadcasting addresses audience in other capacities than merely as citizen, she proposed consumers, audiences and players as potential new categories. Biltreyst framed the redefinition of public broadcasting in the context of the kind of relation it maintains with its public: in addition to the rational cognitive connection, public broadcasting institutions should aim at occupying a central social role because of its affective and emotionally sustaining position for the audience.

The ‘popular’ was deconstructed as containing different but related issues:

1. within public broadcasting programming it is clearly demarcated as a program category that includes drama and entertainment. The papers by Van den Bulck and Reijnders are examples of this approach.
2. However, television and public broadcasting have recently witnessed the rise of a ‘new’ genre called ‘neo-television’ by Mikos which makes the everyday lives and concerns of ordinary people a central theme. This has been of special influence on public journalism as was discussed in the papers of Lunenborg and Strohmaijer.
3. Another dimension of the popular is concerned with pleasure. Both Syvertsen and Mikos addressed the questions whether and how public broadcasters could redefine themselves as providers of simple ‘fun’ which seems fundamentally at odds with their traditional role for the enlightenment of the public.
4. The paper by Rowe about sports and by Reijnders about historical trends in the ‘popular’ revealed the centrality of the body in popular culture, again a focus that seems at odds with the traditional cerebral mission of public broadcasting

5. Sports as a popular genre is also deeply implicated in the constructions of national identity. Strohmaijers paper on Austrian talkshows revealed that national identity can be a relevant dimension of other popular genres as well.
6. Finally, Schröder raised the articulation of the popular with populism, suggesting on the basis of audience research that populist discourse is a legitimate voice drawing from mediated and everyday experiences.

Relating these various dimensions of the popular with rethinking the traditional mission of public broadcasting, issues of cultural citizenship came to the fore: programming, genres and styles of public broadcasting were discussed in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Whereas the ‘popular’ seems to open up public broadcasting to a larger and more varied audience than that which is currently served, it may also undermine its ‘quality’. Quality is a notoriously difficult concept to define. Both Biltereyst and discussant Hermes argued that the usage of the concept in itself, tends to reinforce elitist discourse about good taste. Nevertheless, few participant were willing to give up on a notion of quality, especially since ‘quality’ seems to have become a core element in professional, cultural and everyday judgments about (popular) culture. That is at least what Street argued in his paper about the explosion of literary awards in Britain and the popularity of rankings (the top ten tv-series, e.g.). Broenink distinguished in his paper macro (institutional), meso (genre) and micro (professionalism) dimensions of quality. Biltereyst took on the institutional dimension in his paper, arguing that public broadcasting’s quality relies on its capacity to evoke a relationship of trust and empathy with its audience, especially when considered in the context of the risk society. In Geraghty’s and Drotner’s paper the quality of specific genres and programs were analysed (meso level) Ursell’s paper inserted a political economy view to the discussion, claiming convincingly that cut backs in production and staff mitigate against productions values and professional quality (micro level).

The results of the workshop were summarized in the following table:

<i>Question</i>	<i>Before transformation</i>	<i>Current tendencies</i>	<i>‘Ideal’ situation</i>
<i>What is popular</i>	Program category	Everything with high ratings	High ratings with varied popular programming
<i>What is the goal of popular</i>	Elevation	Audience share, legitimacy	Relevance to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural identities • social cohesion • everyday lives • pleasure, fun • political diversity
<i>What is good popular</i>	Normative perspective	No criteria, non interference	Needs separate quality criteria
<i>Position of the worker</i>	Protected	Free lance	(undiscussed)
<i>Role of information</i>	Informative	Entertaining	Needs professional and academic discussion
<i>Audience address</i>	Citizens	Consumers	Variety of possibilities
<i>Relation with audiences</i>	Educational, rational	Exploitative	Affective, conversational

The participants considered the issue of the quality of popular programming of prime importance and agreed to explore possibilities to follow up on the workshop by setting up a collaborative research project on television awards. Such a project would enable both an aesthetic and a social science approach to the quality of popular culture, focusing on the features of the winning and losing programmes as aesthetic products, as well as analysing the make-up of the committees, conflicts of interest, jury considerations, etc.

(see appendix 1 for paper abstracts).

3. FINAL PROGRAMME

Wednesday June 12.

19.00 Dinner, hosted by the Centre for Popular Culture of ASCoR

Both at: Bushuis, Kloveniersburgwal 48, VOC room

Thursday June 13

9.30 - 12.30 Morning session: **'Quality' and popular culture in public broadcasting**
At: Bushuis, Kloveniersburgwal 48, VOC room

Tryne Syvertsen, University of Oslo, Norway
UNDERSTANDING THE RELATION BETWEEN BROADCASTERS AND THE PUBLIC: RETHINKING
THE CITIZEN-CONSUMER DICHOTOMY

Hans Broenink, Amsterdam School of Communications Research
POPULAR QUALITY IN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

John Street, University of East Anglia, UK.
GETTING STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING: AESTHETICS AND INSTITUTIONS

Daniel Biltreyst, Gent University, Belgium
PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRUST.

Discussants:

Denis McQuail, Emeritus University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
Peter Golding, University of Loughborough, UK.

14.00 - 17.00 Afternoon session: **Histories**
At: Bushuis, Kloveniersburgwal 48, VOC room

Stijn Reijnders, Amsterdam School of Communications Research
FROM POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT TO TELEVISION CULTURE

Hilde van den Bulck, Universitair Instituut Antwerpen, Belgium
LESSONS FROM THE PAST: THE 'PLEASURES' OF MODERNITY'S PSB

Gillian Ursell, All Saints University College, Leeds, UK.
CREATING VALUE AND VALUING CREATION IN CONTEMPORARY UK TELEVISION: OR
'DUMBING DOWN' THE WORKFORCE.

Discussant:

Jan Wieten, Amsterdam School of Communications Research

19.00 - 22.00 Diner session: **Have I got news for you.**
At: Studio Desmet, Plantage Middenlaan 4A, Amsterdam

Diner is hosted by the TROS broadcasting organisation, which sponsors two PhD projects at The Amsterdam School of Communications Research about the changing meanings of popular culture for public broadcasting. The diner will take place at a local Amsterdam television studio Desmet. We will have diner and watch fragments from the Dutch adaptation of *Have I got news for you*. TROS presenter Harm Edens will introduce the fragments. Participants are invited to bring along tapes their own national varieties of this show, or show other tapes relevant to the conference.

Friday June 14

9.30 - 12.30 Morning session: **Popular genres**
At: Bushuis, VOC Room

Papers:

Lothar Mikos, Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen 'Konrad Wolff', Potsdam, Germany.
POLITICS OF PLEASURE; POPULAR TELEVISION GENRES AND THE QUESTION OF QUALITY

David Rowe, University of Newcastle, Australia
PUBLIC BROADCASTING: POPULIST MULTIPLEX OR EDIFYING GHETTO?

Christine Geraghty, Goldsmith College London, UK
AESTHETICS AND QUALITY OF POPULAR TELEVISION DRAMA

Kirsten Drotner, University of Southern Denmark
THE END OF IRONY: AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN DANISH PUBLIC BROADCASTING

Discussant

Joke Hermes, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

14.00 - 17.00 Afternoon session: **Popular television journalism**
At: Bushuis, Koveniersburgwal 48, VOC Room

Margret Lünenborg, University of Leipzig, Germany
JOURNALISM AS POPULAR CULTURE

Petra Strohmaier, University of Klagenfurt, Austria
DAILY TALK ON AUSTRIAN TELEVISION

Kim Schröder, University of Roskilde, Danmark
TELEVISED POPULISM: POPULAR NEWS FORMATS AND THE VIEWERS NEGOTIATION OF POLITICS

Discussant:

Irene Meijer, Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Netherlands

19.00 - 22.00 Diner:
Nam Tin
Jodenbreestraat 14 - 16

Saturday June 15.

10.00 - 12.30 Closing session
Summary statement by Liesbet van Zoonen
At: Hotel Caransa, Rembrandtplein Amsterdam

4. ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

All papers but one were distributed to the participants well before the meeting began. Therefore participants were able to prepare the discussions before which has greatly enhanced the quality of the meeting. The participants have reported high levels of appreciation, both for the intellectual exchange in the workshop as for the congenial and constructive atmosphere. In particular:

- the three PhD students participating in the workshop (Broenink, Reijnders, Strohmaijer) all reported to have been inspired by the discussions, to have received valuable feedback on their presentations, to have found solutions to some of their research issues and to have gained new useful insights for their projects.

The workshop has resulted in two concrete follow-up projects:

- a special issue of the European Journal of Cultural Studies is being prepared in which most papers will be taken up. The special issue is guest edited by Liesbet van Zoonen, the convenor of the workshop;
- a collaborative comparative project on television awards in Europe has been proposed as a follow-up, and is currently considered and developed by the convenor of the workshop Liesbet van Zoonen and one of the discussants Joke Hermes. This project was inspired by the paper of John Street who analysed the growth and meaning of awards in various cultural fields. The participants in this collaboration intend to submit a proposal to the European Collaborative Research Projects in the Social Sciences of the ESF.

5. STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age *</i>	<i>Role</i>
Bilteryest	Belgium	Lecturer	M	40-45	Paper
Broenink	Netherlands	PhD student	M	40-45	Paper
Van den Bulck	Belgium	Lecturer	F	35-40	Paper
Hermes	Netherlands	Lecturer	F	40-45	Discussant
Drotner	Danmark	Professor	F	50-55	Paper
Geraghty	UK	Professor	F	50-55	Paper
Golding	UK	Professor	M	45-50	ESF rep
Lunenborg	Germany	Lecturer	F	35-40	Paper
McQuail	UK	Emeritus	M	55-60	Discussant
Mikos	Germany	Professor	M	40-45	Paper
Meijer	Netherlands	Lecturer	F	40-45	Discussant
Reijnders	Netherlands	PhD student	M	25-30	Paper
Rowe	UK	Professor	M	45-50	Paper
Schroder	Danmark	Lecturer	M	40-45	Paper
Street	UK	Lecturer	M	45-50	Paper
Strohmaijer	Austria	PhD student	F	30-35	Paper
Syvetsen	Norway	Professor	F	40-45	Paper
Wieten	Netherlands	Lecturer	M	55-60	Discussant
Ursell	UK	Lecturer	F	50-55	Paper
Van Zoonen	Netherlands	Professor	F	40-45	Convenor

* this is based on a personal impression of the convenor

Number of participants and roles

20 people participated in the workshop of whom 14 presented papers which – with one exception - were all distributed to the participants well before the meeting. Five people participated as discussants, including the ESF representative Golding. Van Zoonen chaired the whole meeting.

Country of origin

In line with the proposal the participants came from a variety of Norther European countries: Netherlands 6, UK 6, Danmark 2, Germany 2, Belgium 2, Norway 1, Austria 1.

Status

The participants consisted of a mixture of young and experienced scholars, 3 PhD students, 9 lecturers, 7 professors and 1 emeritus.

Gender

There was an exact 50-50 gender balance among the participants.

Age

The main age group seems to have been the one consisting of 40 to 45 years old (8).

6. FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Bilteyst, Daniel	Dept. of Communication Studies Working Group Film and Television Studies Gent Universiteit Universiteitstraat 8 B-9000 Gent - Belgium daniel.bilteyst@rug.ac.be
Broenink, Hans	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam Netherlands Hans.broenink@tros.nl
Bulck., Hilde van den	UIA Universiteitsplein 1 2610 Wilrijk hilde.vandenbulck@ua.ac.be
Costera Meijer, Irene	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam Netherlands meijer@pscw.uva.nl
Hermes, Joke	Film and Television Studies University of Amsterdam Nieuwe Doelenstraat 16 1012 CP Amsterdam, Netherlands hermes@hum.uva.nl
Drotner, Kirsten	Dept. of Literature, Culture & Media USD Odense University 55 Campusvej DK 5230 Odense M. Denmark drotner@litcul.sdu.dk
Geraghty, Christine	Department of Media and Communications Goldsmiths College New Cross London SE14 6NW United Kingdom coa01cg@gold.ac.uk
Golding, Peter	Dept. of Social Sciences, Loughborough University LE11 3TU UK P.Golding@lboro.ac.uk
Lunenborg, Margret	Leipzig University Insitut fur Kommunikations und Medienwissenschaft Klostergasse 5 04109 Leipzig Germany MLUENEN@aol.com
McQuail, Denis	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam Netherlands 106233.3000@compuserve.com
Mikos, Lothar	Hochschule fur Film un Fernsehen Konrad Wolf AV Medienwissenschaft Marlene Dietrich Allee 11 D-14482 Potsdam-Babelsberg l.mikos@hff-potsdam.de

Reijnders, Stijn	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam Netherlands sreijnders@fmg.uva.nl
Rowe, David	School of Social Sciences Faculty of Education and Arts GP Building, The University of Newcastle University Drive, Callaghan New South Wales 2308 Australia David.Rowe@newcastle.edu.au
Schroder, Kim	Kim Christian Schröder Professor, Department of Communication Building 43.3, P.O. Box 260, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark Direct line: (+45) 46 74 38 08, telefax: (+45) 46 74 30 75 Email: kimsc@ruc.dk , http://akira.ruc.dk/~kimsc/
Street, John	J.Street@uea.ac.uk School of Economic and Social Studies University of East Anglia Norwich NR4 7TJ England J.Street@uea.ac.uk
Strohmaier, Petra	Department of Media- and Communication Studies University of Klagenfurt Universitätsstr. 65-67 A - 9020 Klagenfurt Österreich / Austria Petra.Strohmaier@uni-klu.ac.at
Syvvertsen, Tryne	University of Oslo Department of Media and Communication P.O. Box 1093 0317 Oslo Norway trine.syvvertsen@media.uio.no
Wieten, Jan	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam Netherlands wieten@pscw.uva.nl
Ursell, Gillian	Centre for Journalism, Trinity & All Saints University College, Leeds LS18 5HD. United Kingdom g_ursell@TASC.AC.UK
Zoonen, Liesbet van	Amsterdam School of Communications Research, Universiteit van Amsterdam Kloveniersburgwal 48 1012 CX Amsterdam, Netherlands vanzoonen@pscw.uva.nl

APPENDIX 1. ABSTRACTS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Daniel Biltreyst, Gent University, Belgium
PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRUST.

In this paper we claim that the long strain of (quantitative) programming analyses on the 'convergence' between public service and commercial television channels may be useful, but tends to lose sight of other core differences - mainly in terms of atmosphere, mode of address and (self-) legitimising discourses. While public broadcasters may have difficulties in living up to (and even tend to hide) a rationally constructed ideal of public service broadcasting, they use a more complex strategy of the everyday performance of trust. The cool, rational enlightenment ideal of PSB has made room for a day-to-day construction of trust - where hard, cool information as well as entertainment with banal emotions may reside.

Hans Broenink, Amsterdam School of Communications Research
POPULAR QUALITY IN PUBLIC BROADCASTING

The question in this paper is whether and if so how, quality standards could be developed for popular programmes in the setting of public broadcasting. It is a first outline of the PhD proposal of the author which uses theories of high and low culture, taste communities and audience appreciation to de- and reconstruct quality assessments in public broadcasting.

Hilde van den Bulck, Universitair Instituut Antwerpen, Belgium
LESSONS FROM THE PAST: THE 'PLEASURES' OF MODERNITY'S PSB

To talk about the possible public values of popular programming in contemporary PSB may prove not such a *contradictio in terminis* since, in the past, PSB can be demonstrated to have had clear ideas and goals concerning its popular programmes. Normative theories on popular television genres for PSB today, can benefit from a little hindsight. This paper will, first, look at the typical PSB entertainment genres and the goals and objectives that are reflected in their format and content. Second, it will look at the scheduling tactics and strategies that were typically used to obtain the goals and objectives, and at the specific position of entertainment programmes in this. This first and second part will be based both on general observations in this regard and, at the same time, on the analysis of the programming of Flemish PSB in the period 1953-1973 as a case in point.

Kirsten Drotner, University of Southern Denmark
THE END OF IRONY: AESTHETICS AND ETHICS IN DANISH PUBLIC BROADCASTING

In the face of deregulation and increased commercial pressure, many public broadcasters attempt to rejuvenate their programme output in order to increase their youthful audience share. As my point of departure I will take *Taeskeholdet*, a highly successful Danish radio and tv talk show, whose ironic mode of address set new aesthetic and discursive limits in Danish public broadcasting in the late 1990s. My paper will discuss some of the aesthetic and thematic options chosen by national public broadcasters in accommodating to a more complex media culture and the possible consequences for audiences in terms of gender and generation.

Christine Geraghty, Goldsmith College London, UK
AESTHETICS AND QUALITY OF POPULAR TELEVISION DRAMA

Notions of quality, taste and standards can be applied to popular television drama. There does seem to be in British writing on television an awareness that these questions have been neglected in the study of television as popular culture.

Margret Lünenborg, University of Leipzig, Germany
JOURNALISM AS POPULAR CULTURE

This paper will focus on the Docu-Soap as a new genre realizing modified forms of journalistic encoding. The genre can be seen as a successful attempt of public broadcasting to use its own resources (documentary) and give them a more popular notion by new ways of storytelling (known by soap operas). Trying to build a bridge between serious content and popular presentation by docu-soaps European public broadcasters seem to stop on half of the way. The media discourse on this genre in Germany seems to justify this strategy of public broadcasters. In media critique there is a strong distinction between „quality documentaries“, which are mostly docu-soaps produced by public broadcasting companies and ‚light products‘ done by the commercial companies. The media discourse still reflects the „disgust of the light“ Winterhoff-Spurk (2000) described the academic discourse on popular media.

Lothar Mikos, Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen 'Konrad Wolff', Potsdam, Germany.
POLITICS OF PLEASURE; POPULAR TELEVISION GENRES AND THE QUESTION OF QUALITY

Since the beginning of deregulation of the broadcasting system in Germany in the Eighties many popular television genres appear, first in the new commercial channels and some of them also at the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF. There are daily soap operas in both systems (produced by the same production company), daily talk shows (only a public one with a pastor as host), game shows, reality shows and a lot of sports events. The politics of public broadcasters in Germany is one of competition mostly not by convergence than by keeping their traditions. The paper raises the question of quality of popular television genres from a 'Bourdieuian' perspective and takes talk shows, reality shows and sports as examples.

Stijn Reijnders, Amsterdam School of Communications Research
FROM POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT TO TELEVISION CULTURE

Within several decennia, Dutch television has developed into the dominant pastime. Before the introduction of television, Holland has known a rich tradition of entertainment, with fairs, cabaret show, popular sports and comedy plays. Even though these forms have not completely disappeared, people eagerly exchanged the square, the village hall or the city theatre for the couch in front of the television. In this paper, I would like to focus on the early stages of Dutch entertainment television. How did television make use of the tradition of entertainment in the Netherlands and what news did it bring? By analysing the broadcasts in the period 1966-1973, I expect television entertainment has developed from a mere service hatch of traditional forms of entertainment to more self-employed, medium-characteristic forms.

David Rowe, University of Newcastle, Australia
PUBLIC BROADCASTING: POPULIST MULTIPLEX OR EDIFYING GHETTO?

Public broadcasting is sometimes thought to enable the creation and sustainment of a cultural nationhood constructed on inclusive, non-commodified lines. In promoting 'cultural citizenship' through sport, national broadcasters have unashamedly pointed to the prime importance of their national-popular role. Importantly, some major sporting organisations like the International Olympic Committee and FIFA have supported them – although largely (and ironically) on grounds of the economic value of audience reach and cultural legitimacy. But broadcast sport's unequivocal status as popular culture has left it vulnerable to arguments that it should be covered by the market. This paper uses television sport as a case study in the exploration and analysis of these dilemmas of public broadcasting in Europe, and seeks to propose a tenable normative framework for both its maintenance and development.

Kim Schröder, University of Roskilde, Danmark

TELEVISED POPULISM: POPULAR NEWS FORMATS AND THE VIEWERS NEGOTIATION OF POLITICS

The paper springs from a project analysing the constitution of 'the political' in contemporary Denmark. It will focus on 'the public potential of popular programming'. The TV program I focus on is a recent public-journalism/tabloid format called "19 Direkte" (named after the broadcast time at 19.00) on the Danish public service broadcaster's channel, based on the idea that the popular voice should rule the airwaves (in this program at least): there is a ban on experts as participants, there is a phone-in component, there is studio panel debate (no studio audience), often politicians are cast as the villains. There have been fierce debates in the press about the populism of this program, and the utter boredom of educated viewers having to listen to 'ordinary people's opinions.

John Street, University of East Anglia, UK.

GETTING STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING: AESTHETICS AND INSTITUTIONS

The paper claims that it is necessary to make distinctions between the qualities of popular culture. These judgments are inseparable from ethical and political values. Which values exactly inform popular critical discourse and what are its implications for popular culture within public broadcasting? The treatment of the values debate highlights the importance of the conditions and context of judgment, of which institutional forms, for instance in arts prize panels, are a main part.

Petra Strohmaier, University of Klagenfurt, Austria

DAILY TALK ON AUSTRIAN TELEVISION

In its competition with German commercial broadcasting, the ORF has produced - among other things - a daily talkshow that is "is of interest to the Austrians" and that raises "questions which people frequently ask themselves" and those issues should be worked on "in a human way" by means of "journalistic professionalism, emotion and lots of humour" - a strategy which seems to work out for the Austrian audience. Despite its economic and audience success, the Austrian press has been sharply criticising the format and has been continuously playing down the host and the content of the show. The ORF legitimises the show by differentiating it from the German equivalents; these are said to be more extreme. Also the specific Austrianness of the show is foregrounded.

Tryne Syvertsen, University of Oslo, Norway

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATION BETWEEN BROADCASTERS AND THE PUBLIC: RETHINKING THE CITIZEN-CONSUMER DICHOTOMY

In debates about broadcasting it is often alleged that public broadcasting, "serve people as citizens" whereas commercial broadcasting and various forms of popular culture "serve people as consumers". However, neither the concept of "audience" nor "customer" grasps the new forms of interaction between broadcasting and the public that is opened up by new forms of participatory television. I will discuss whether there are other, more suitable concepts that can be used to describe the relationships between broadcasters and their publics, and the challenges these developments presents to public broadcasters.

Gillian Ursell, All Saints University College, Leeds, UK.

CREATING VALUE AND VALUING CREATION IN CONTEMPORARY UK TELEVISION: OR 'DUMBING DOWN' THE WORKFORCE.

There has always been a well-represented practice in British public broadcasting of entertainment programmes which simultaneously educate and inform. However, the future of such programs is at least as much contingent on employment and working conditions for broadcast workers as it is on scheduling decisions and niche marketing. I will attempt to demonstrate by reference to empirical studies that workers in broadcasting often aspire to laudable social, cultural and aesthetic values, but that a mixture of political deregulation, market forces and the application of new technologies have led to employment and working conditions which are increasingly uncondusive to the realisation of these values.