Title:

Production as Reception?
A Theoretical Approach to a Production Analysis of Television Satire.

Abstract

Recently, contributions to research in the growing field of media production analysis have stressed the importance of form, representation and genre in the analysis of production processes and in the analysis of changes in a specific field of media production (Frandsen, 2007; Cottle, 2004; Ytreberg, 1999; Dornfeld, 1998). Consequently, production analysis seems to be moving from what can be termed as a socio-centric approach towards a more communicative and media-centric approach.

The more communicative and media-centric approach has put weight and focus on the creative and innovative work of media producers. But it has also pointed to a discussion of how different genres demand different theoretical and methodological approaches in understanding the demands put to the producers. Frandsen (2007:51) argues that to a large degree the production process is structured by genre, and this means we need to understand the communicative intentions and characteristics of genre when deciding on the theoretical and methodological approaches to a specific production analysis.

This paper aims to support that claim by introducing the motivation for as well as arguing a specific theoretical approach in an ongoing production analysis into the development of television satire in Denmark. Television satire has since 1968 been an important genre in the entertainment profile of public service television in Denmark (Bruun, 2007).
Furthermore, the genre is deeply dependent on the innovative, interpretative abilities of producers, editors, writers and performers to offer the viewers a critical, comprehensible and, most importantly, funny diagnosis of a shared socio-political and cultural reality. During the last 10-15 years the programmes have undergone big qualitative and quantitative changes alongside changes in the production environment, most prominently the growing media competition for specific audiences, technological changes as well as organisational and media policy changes. The interpretation of the genre by the producers seems to have undergone change, and the study aims to understand the driving forces in the development within this specific field of media production.

The paper argues a theoretical approach in socio-cognitive reception theory to the study of these changes in media production because of its understanding of genre as a dynamic and flexible mental schema (Höijer, 1998 & 1996; Hagen, 1998; Bruhn-Jensen, 1998; Bruun, 2004). Media researchers have argued that there are good reasons to understand media productions as a result of an ongoing media reception and re-interpretation process (Scannell, 1996; Ytreberg, 2000; Ekecrantz, 1998). This suggestion is (still) promising, but it needs further theoretical qualifications when applied to production analysis. Consequently, the paper will finally suggest that a combination of the understanding of genre in socio-cognitive reception theory and the concept of ‘figured world’ developed in cultural anthropology (Holland et al. 1998) could be a fruitful inspiration in the theoretical approach.
Introduction

This paper aims to introduce and discuss a theoretical approach in an ongoing text production analysis of satire in Danish public service television. Television satire forms a solid tradition of domestic program production, but programmes labelled as satire have gone through profound changes during the last 10 years. The aim of the ongoing study is therefore to shed some light on the changes in what I term the professional ideology of this specific field of production, and to understand the driving forces in the development. The theoretical approach suggested will address recent developments in production analysis important to this aim and it will support a genre perspective by introducing three main assumptions guiding the empirical study. Even if the study is interested in understanding changes in the production of satire, the paper will argue a theoretical approach in socio-cognitive reception theory to the study of these changes. This reception theory has a fruitful understanding of genre as a dynamic and flexible mental schema that is individually as well as socially constructed. The individual in making sense of the media uses these genre schemata in the reception processes. Moreover, media researchers have argued that there are good reasons to understand media productions as a result of an ongoing media reception and re-interpretation process (Scannell, 1994, 1996, 2003; Ytreberg, 2000; Ekecrantz, 1998 inter alia). This suggestion is (still) promising, but it needs further theoretical qualifications when applied to text production analysis. A socio-cognitive understanding of texts and genres has an ability to be a sort of ‘missing link’ between the humanities and the social sciences (Bruun, 2004). Consequently, the paper will finally suggest that the notion of genre in socio-cognitive reception theory combined with the concept of ‘figured world’ developed in cultural anthropology (Holland et al. 1998) could be a fruitful inspiration to the theoretical approach in the study of a changing professional ideology.

1 The study is part of a research program supported by the Danish National Council for the Humanities FKK. The program is called Television Entertainment: Knowledge and Cross-mediality, and involves senior researchers from three Danish universities. For more information please see: http://www.tvunderholdning.au.dk/en/
Genre in production analysis

Recently, important contributions to research in the growing field of media production analysis have stressed the importance of form, representation and genre in the analysis of production processes and in the analysis of changes in a specific field of media production (Frandsen, 2007; Cottle, 2004; Ytreberg, 1999; Dornfeld, 1998 inter alia). These examples of work seem to be suggesting a move from what can be described as a socio-centric approach towards a more communicative and media-centric approach. Analysis of organisational and media systemic changes and the interplay with the micro level of production processes are still extremely important dimensions of production analysis. But the researchers have emphasised that the actual textual aspects of the productions are equally important to the analysis and the methodological. Consequently, humanistic skills in terms of theories and methodological approaches are called for as well as the sociological and anthropological ones traditionally dominating production analysis.

To signal an approach that is including the media products – the texts - Ytreberg (1999) calls his approach text production analysis stressing the specific focus of the research into the changes in the production of factual entertainment in Norwegian public service television in the late eighties and early nineties. He states his analytical ambition as follows:

(….) the main focus in this type of text production study is on the possibilities for an integration of approaches: 1) to grasp the special forms of continuity, division of labour and team coordination governing television production 2) to link the analysis of the priorities of the production to the result of these priorities, that is the texts 3) to demonstrate the alternation between the textual structures and the text interpretations that guides and are guided by them. (Ytreberg 1999:272-273, translated from Norwegian by HB)

The aim is to account for the changing role of authority in the genre factual entertainment.

Cottle also argues that media forms and genres should be at the centre of attention if the aim is to understand how “media representations are constructed, conditioned and conveyed” (ibid., 81). Further more, Cottle uses the term or metaphor ‘production ecology’ to underscore his holistic
focus drawing on Bourdieu’s term cultural field (Cottle 2004:82). As Cottle puts it the interest in form:

(…) helps to broaden our focus to a consideration of the encompassing forms and appeals of media genres, their impact on media representations, as well as their determination at the moment of production. (ibid., 81)

The media-centric approach and its focus on genre has also pointed to the presumption that genre plays a central role in understanding the differences between production processes. Based on a diagnosis of research done on different genres, Frandsen argues that the production process is probably structured by genre in a more profound way than perhaps previously assumed (Frandsen, 2007:51). The consequence of this presumption is that researchers need to understand the communicative intentions and characteristics of the genre(s) involved when deciding on the theoretical and methodological approaches to a specific production analysis. Elaborating on the metaphor ‘production ecology’ suggested by Cottle, it could be assumed that production of television entails many ‘biotopes’ all influenced by some of the same environmental forces but also relatively independent self-sustaining systems. As a result, changes with in the production of for example sports may be asynchronous and qualitatively very different from changes with in the production of documentaries or game shows, even if they are all reacting to some of the same forces.

To sum up, the importance ascribed to genre in the more media-centric approach to production analysis will be elaborated in this paper, and the overarching theoretical point of departure is a pragmatic approach to genre (Bruun Andersen, 1994; Corner 1991; Neal 1980). This interest in genre aims to understand what genre does in a communication process. Hence, function is more important than definition. Taking this understanding of genre into account genre becomes a common denominator for texts and horizons of expectations held by producers as well as audiences (Jauss, 1980): Genre is used to group texts with features in common, and genre is a reception category used by the media user as well as a production category used by mores or less professional media producers (Bruun, 2004:26-27).

A professional ideology in transition: Television satire

As a production category television satire is a genre deeply dependent on the innovative, interpretative abilities of producers, editors, writers and
performers. The aim is to offer the viewers a critical, comprehensible and, most importantly, funny diagnosis of a presumed shared socio-political and cultural reality. But it seems as if the understanding of what satire is and why it is produced is changing in Danish public service television. Seen from a text analytical point of view a transformation of content and form has taken place with in the programming tradition of television satire in Danish public service television during the last ten years, and the amount of programmes labelled as satire has exploded. To illustrate this quantitative change PS-television in Denmark – DR and TV 2 - scheduled 68 first run programmes in the period from 1991-95, but 340 first run programmes in the period from 2001-05.²

In terms of content the programmes have incorporated the satirical treatment of not only the political but also social and lifestyle aspects of modern life in the Danish society. In fact social satire is now dominating the more traditional political satire. This development means that the viewers are presupposed to be knowledgeable of social and political issues, stereotypes, mentalities and narratives in the society they live in. The viewers are also supposed to know the social do’s and don’t, and to know the normative frameworks of the social-political realities the viewers live in. The producers of satire presume a competent viewer with a deep insight, and this competence can be based on first hand experiences as well as second hand through the media. The viewers are addressed as ordinary or everyday sociologists and citizens, and because of social satires dominant position political knowledge picked up from news media on an everyday basis is getting less important.

In terms of form a lot of different media genres and aesthetic conventions of different media discourses are put to use as the aesthetic vehicle of the satire as well as the object of satire in itself. Parody and especially pastiche are increasingly important, and media satire is therefore a prominent aim of television satire. The programmes are very often multi-platform formats involving the internet and television (Bruun, 2007). The viewers are presupposed to be knowledgeable of media aesthetics and the form and content of different media genres on different platforms. They are presumed to be experienced media users, and the viewers are addressed as everyday or ordinary media cultural literates, so to speak, who are able to

² These figures are based on a catalogue of satirical sketch comedy produced by DR1, DR2, TV 2 and TV2/Zulu from 1968-2005. The catalogue is made by the author of this paper with the assistance of two research assistants Stine Lomborg and Signe Kroman
understand and detect genre clues and mistakes intuitively and fast in order to get the entertaining qualities of the satirical treatment.

In the same period television satire has moved from being scheduled at the mainstream channels as part of a Saturday-night entertainment profile aimed at a mainstream audience to be scheduled at niche channels provided by the PS-institutions. The programmes are targeted at the young, the young adults and the better-educated segments of the audience (Bruun, 2006; Bruun, 2007). Television satire seems to have become a strategic tool in the growing competition for specific audiences and in what Ellis has described as the emerging multiplatform era (Ellis 2000). Consequently, television satire plays an important role in the transformation of the public service institutions. These institutions are trying to survive in the new era by re-defining their obligations from being broadcasters of public service programming on television and radio to being providers of public service media on different platforms.

These changes in the body of programmes and in the scheduling of the programmes can be seen as part of the strategic use of the genre by the public service institutions. First and foremost, entertainment with satirical content is very compatible with a traditional notion of public service media being the arena for public and political issues (Ytreberg, 1999) The institutions can fairly easy defend television satire with its critical sting against the critics of other entertainment genres on the schedule like quiz shows, game shows and talk shows. During the time of the monopoly (1951-1988) the critic was that these genres were inane and dumbing down the audience as well as incompatible with the Enlightenment mission of public service. And in a time of growing competition between PS and commercial media it is still easy to defend as part of an entertainment profile different from what commercial television is offering (Bruun, 2006). Another good reason for the PS-institutions to give priority to the genre is, that even if television satire has a moral content, the genre could be an important tool in the rejuvenation and branding of PS-institutions as institutions of the future – not the past. Because of its ridicule and fun-poking attitude towards pompous characters and normative boundaries of different kinds television satire can easily distance it self from paternalistic and patronising associations the audience might have towards these institutions (Ytreberg, 1999). For these reasons satire is obviously seen as a strong card in the competition for young audiences, and these segments of the audience are difficult to draw in, but important for financial and/or political reasons (Søndergaard, 2008). Finally, the priority given to television satire can be seen as a way of fulfilling the obligations to stimulate, support and facilitate
original Danish cultural production and to use different platforms in order to reach the public. Both obligations are central to DR’s public service charter 2007-2010, and especially DR has been developing satire formats across platforms. For an integrated production and broadcaster institution like DR, television satire can also be a way to detect, attract and hold on to new television talents. In this way an open-door-policy is implemented to secure a connection to creative resources out side of the institution. Recently DR established a net site connected to the popular satire site on dr.dk where it is possible to pitch your own – amateur – satire and get it distributed on the site. Several new satirical talents with success on the site have then been recruited into making professional television.

To sum up, all these reasons are about the needs of the PS-institutions to position themselves and legitimize themselves in relation to audiences, politicians and other competing media institutions on the market. But it still leaves questions of how the actual ways of producing television satire have changed. The aim of the text production study is therefore to shed some light on the changes, in the professional ideology of this specific field of production, and to understand the driving forces in the development. By using the term ‘professional ideology’ I try to coin my interest in understanding the value based and from professional experience- and knowledge-based work being done resulting in the actual programmes. These satirical programmes are contributing to a national or more segmented media culture and they are influencing the understanding and construction of the socio-political reality they are mirroring. Controllers, Commissioning editors, executive producers, programme editors, writers and directors are making these changes in the body of programmes and in the scheduling happen. As a point of departure in this study, these changes are viewed as genre interpretations made in this specific field of production. They are interpretations involving the growing media competition for specific audiences, technological changes as well as organisational and media policy changes affecting the way this particular television genre and programme tradition is perceived and produced. All of these factors are believed to influence the ideological orientations of the producers in terms of what is believed to be the purpose of satire, and of what is good and relevant, as well as in line with the needs of the viewers, the broadcaster, the production company etc.

In this ongoing study, three main assumptions are held on the links between the changes to the body of programmes and the scheduling and the overriding professional ideology producing them. Firstly, new sources of inspiration in terms of form and content are presumed to influence the
professional ideology. In terms of content there has been a detachment from a professional ideology marked by journalism and especially the newspaper as a medium. This means that the understanding of the issues of political satire is changing from reflecting the kind of knowledge formed by the national news agenda. The ideology is perhaps moving towards an understanding of satire that focuses on mentalities and zeitgeist portraying the problems of individuals living in late modernity. The focus is on showing the impact of the times in the everyday lives, behaviours and presentations of selves of ordinary Danes. To a large extent satire shares interests with television fiction, but it is probably still perceived as different caused by mode of address, and the referential and satirical humour? In terms of form there has been a detachment from a professional ideology marked by the playing style, the staging and the dramaturgy specific to a national tradition for political cabaret and revues. Further more, there has been a detachment from mirroring the schedule of news and its need for actuality. In stead the programmes are using the genres, representations and forms of the television medium, and other media. These changes to content and form are presumed to have an impact on the organisation of the production mode, the professional competences needed and involved, and on the division of labour. In addition, the changes to content and form are presumed to have an impact on the forms of knowledge involved in the production and the reception of satire.

The second main assumption held on the links between the changes to the body of programmes and the scheduling and the overriding professional ideology producing them has to do with public service broadcasters trying to transform into public service media–providers. The aim is to use more platforms in the production: to do multi-platform formats. And the aim is to use more platforms in the distribution of satire. Both can be expected to have an impact on the production schedule of the programmes. Longer production times are probably needed and perhaps not compatible with the actuality value of traditional political satire. Traditional political satire is made difficult, promoting social and media satire, and specific domains of knowledge are favoured. New ways of using the media products to a very large extent mean a growing need for content independent of the news agenda, and traditional political satire falls behind: Because of the interactive dimension of new media the individual user decides when to use the satirical format, not the television schedule made by the broadcasters. The actuality value of traditional political satire is difficult to maintain and defend, if the content has to be appealing at any time. Actuality linked to the
news agenda also makes the lifespan of the products short and not fit for recycling on different platforms.

The third main assumption held on the links between the changes to the body of programmes and the scheduling, and the overriding professional ideology producing them is that political satire is moving away from the sketch comedy format. Recently, experiments with traditional documentary and current affairs genres have incorporated a satirical approach. However, these programmes are not part of what is labelled satire. They are not part of the entertainment profile offered, and the genre distances itself from direct political issues.

**Genre schema in production analysis**

In order to address these changes in the interpretation of the genre as a production category, I would suggest a theoretical point of departure taken in socio-cognitive reception theory. This theoretical understanding of texts and genres has an ability to be a sort of ‘missing link’ between the humanities and the social sciences (Bruun, 2004). This reception theory has an interest in understanding the part played by mental text and genre schemata in the sense making processes of the audiences. The schemata are frames for interpreting and for organising experiences, expectations and understandings. The media users throughout life establish these constructions, and the schemata form a kind of mental architecture (Waldahl 1998:43-44). But schemata are not recipes, but a sort of frame of reference build from using media products and used in making sense of new experiences, and as the basis for building new schemata.

Socio-cognitive or cultural cognitive reception theory has its inspiration in cognitive psychology - the so-called schema theory (Shore, 1996) - and is thereby linked to contemporary brain research in the natural sciences. But it has developed a very strong interest in the social dimensions involved in the process of making sense of media texts and genres in particular by the individual media user. Audience researchers like Höijer (1991; 1996), Hagen (1998) Bruhn Jensen (1998) and Bruun (2004) have used this reception theory in empirical reception analysis. The aim in these implementations is to unravel the kind of text or genre schema(ta) at work and to understand the functions of the different schemata in the communication process and in the experiences of the viewers.

The main assumption is that large parts of these mental schemata used in making sense of and using the media link the individual to the social and the collective conditions for this sense making process. Hagen coins this by
saying that the schemata “are both inside and outside the head. Thus, schemas are both mental structures and materialized practices” (Hagen 1998:64). The mental schemata of the individual are results of structural and social conditions, social norms and media expectations influencing the individual, and the result of the individual’s interpretations of these conditions. Thus, the genre schemata are believed to be shared by people with similar historic, social and cultural backgrounds, but are still marked by the individual and his or hers personal background. In this sense, the genre schemata are context dependent, and will change over time and in space. The genre schemata are believed to be stable structures and dynamic at the same time. In many ways this notion of genre corresponds to a pragmatic understanding of genre (Bruun Andersen, 1994; Corner, 1991) introduced above, and I will return to this issue later in this paper.

I will suggest, that this theoretical understanding of media texts, genre and the communication process as marked by interpretations of an individual/psychological as well as collective/social nature is theoretically useful to text production analysis. As mentioned, it has primarily been used in reception analysis and as an alternative to a more radical social constructivism making theoretical generalisations on human sense making impossible (as an example Ang, 1996). But there is nothing in the epistemological basis of this theoretical approach that prevents it from being used as the theoretical approach to a text production study. In fact, Shore argues for a holistic approach to the study of media using schema theory:

(…) schema theory in cognitive psychology, has the potential to bridge the sometimes formidable divide between the study of media production and that of audience reception. (Shore, 1998:7)

To focus on the production of media and culture as well as on the reception of it is widely supported in media research at large. Furthermore, it is not at all controversial to regard interpretations of texts and genres as a prerequisite in media production. Never the less, socio-cognitive reception theory offers a way of understanding the close connection between production and reception of media. Thereby it offers a new theoretical perspective on two classic meta-theoretical issues in production analysis concerning the relationship between structure and agency and between the interests in texts or contexts.

Structure and agency
In production analysis a key issue affecting the theoretical approaches as well as the methodological choices in the empirical work done is the researcher’s understanding of the interplay of structure and agency. How is the causal relationship between the objective conditions of media production and the work of the media producers understood? What is the balance of power like, and what is seen as forces of determination? Is media output determined by political and economic as well as organisational forces in the media business and by genre conventions governing the field of production? Or is media output determined by the creative and innovative work done by the media producers as individuals as well as a collective?

Cottle (2003) tries to bridge this classic dichotomy by recommending a re-orientation in news production studies. The explanatory emphasis should be moved towards production practises in favour of routine. This conceptualisation borrows from Foucault, and

“(…) is preferable in that it can accommodate both a sense of the ‘discursive’ and the ‘administrative’ in the enactments and regulation of social processes – including those of cultural production” (Cottle 2003:17).

In his article, Cottle criticises the traditional emphasis of structural explanations to textual changes within production analysis and thereby the disinterest in human agency and creativity in these studies. The journalists are easily regarded as ‘puppets on a string’, which is at odds with the self-perception of most professionals - also journalists. In a meta-theoretical diagnosis of this dichotomy, Frandsen (2007) analyses selected production studies across different genres, highlighting the profound differences between two branches with in the broad field of production analysis: the so-called auteur studies on the one hand, and the mass media studies on the other.

The auteur studies approach is typically associated with film studies focusing on the films as texts and the conscious or subconscious creative abilities and motivations of the individual film director. The mass media studies approach is focused on the production of different television genres, but typically focused on the production of news in television as part of a public sphere. Frandsen points to the many theoretical and methodological differences between the two branches and argues how these are closely linked to the objects of research: If interested in film the researcher tends to focus on texts, agency and creativity, and to regard structural power as either a negative or positive player in the implementation of the artistic ambitions. If
the researcher is interested in mass media especially news, he/she tends to focus on the a functionalistic or critical approach to the structural forces, and the collective aspects of the production process. Questions of creativity and artistic ambitions are left out of focus in favour of the importance of organisational settings, routines and genre conventions. On the basis of this diagnosis, Frandsen argues that instead of asking the question of whether structural forces or the forces of agency have power of determination over media output, the focus should be on genre. The aim should be to explore the interplay of agency and structure in different genres by analysing the specific kinds of creative and innovative work of media producers involved. (Frandsen, 2007:51-52).

To take these circumventions of the classic dichotomy a step further a socio-cognitive/schema theoretical approach would regard the relationship of structure and agency as processes between causal powers of different kinds. Both are important, but none is taken to be the most powerful in advance. Due to the understanding of genre, the consequence for a text production analysis is to focus as much on the structural as on the agency aspects of the production practise and processes. The genre schema governing the production is a result of the recursive connection between structure and agency: The genre schema is constructed by human interpretation of media products and the specific context of media production in a specific field. Thus, the genre schema links the individual media producer to other members of the production team and to the specific conditions within the production environment. The production environment is marked by conventional production practises, economic, technological and organisational structures and values. But they are dynamic and can be changed. All of this forms the basis for developing new text productions that over time plays a part in changing the production practises and the overriding professional ideology.

Consequently, to understand the genre schema used by the media producers would be at the centre of interest in my study, as well as the aim to understand the changes to the schema over time. In terms of research design in my specific research project it will be important to interview individuals working on different levels of an organisational structure and in different functions in order to grasp the way the programmes were and still are produced, put into discourse as well as legitimized by these different narrators. However, as the results from three decades of audience studies and reception analysis have taught us, no deterministic, transparent or indeed harmonious relationship between texts and reception can be expected. Like wise, conflicts of different kinds, face, questions of discursive power and
value struggles will probably be the case from a production point of view, and not harmony. Furthermore the relationship between texts and the interpreters are very different when the perspective is moved from reception to production analysis, and I will return to this issue later in this paper. But to sum up, a schema theoretical approach could pave the way for a theoretically backed interest in understanding the values and specific practises, creative and individual skills in the professional culture of television satire with out loosing the many structural aspects in the explanation.

**Texts and contexts**
The other classic issue within production studies is the relationship between the interest in texts and contexts. That is the interest in analysing for example media texts and genres and their historic developments, and the interest in explaining why these development have taken place and/or how a culture understands its media representations. Ytreberg (2000) addresses this as part of the fundamental ambition in media studies to see media communication as a continuum that links production, text and reception. This ambition has called for an integration of the humanistic tradition of studying texts and social science approaches to contexts, defined as macro, meso and micro levels of society and of organisations. Theoretical approaches in Foucault’s discourse theory and critical discourse theory (often Fairclough, 1995) have been ways of bridging between the two scientific traditions. But according to Ytreberg, the integration ambition is in need of a discussion. Especially in the methodological and empirical phases the problems of integration of the two traditions becomes clear resulting in research either analysing only texts, or analysing texts and contexts but of a very abstract kind (Ytreberg 2000:58).

In short, the ambition to use textual analysis as part of production analysis does not seem to have an integrating perspective that really works. Like this present study of television satire, Ytreberg suggests a pragmatic understanding of genre using Neale (1980) as the theoretical approach, and he outlines three methodological strategies to solve the problem of integration focusing on the “concrete production and reception processes of which the texts form a part”. Ytreberg suggests an exchange strategy, a separation strategy and a generative strategy (ibid. 59). These are very fruitful methodological suggestions for different kinds of text production studies trying to grasp the recursive connection presumed. Especially the exchange strategy is relevant to the study of the developments in television satire because of the timeframe of the study. But all the suggested strategies
could be enhanced by the notion of texts, genre and agency in socio-cognitive schema theory offering a theoretical link between humanities, especially the main concepts of hermeneutic theory and semiotics, and social sciences.

In socio-cognitive reception theory the texts are seen as manifestations of an individually and socially constructed genre schema, and is for that same reason important to use in the methodological design of a production study. The relationship between the actual texts and the genre schema is of a both stable and dynamic nature. The texts are manifestations of the schema, but by using the genre schema in ways that differentiates the texts from each other and under the influence of a changing production context, the schema will gradually change. This is probably not a process conscious to the producers, but part of the development within a profession changing the practices and the values of the profession.

According to this take on texts and genre, media producers are regarded as knowledgeable, skilful and powerful participants in the professional construction of media output. A role very different to the typical role of a media user, who has no or very limited influence on traditional media output. From this point of view, media products, media institutions and media systems are seen as dependent on human agency using production skills, and using economic, technological and political structures (media professionals, politicians and bureaucrats inter alia), and not by abstract agency free media systems (Vestergaard, 2007:63-65). This theoretical approach entails a methodological argument for using data generated by interviews and observations with media producers focusing on their professional knowledge and experiences. Hence, the media producers are not seen as ‘puppets on a string’, but as professionals carrying out a job influenced by the contextual conditions. In this manner socio-cognitive reception theory offers a kind of missing link between the theories and methods from the humanities and the social sciences at work in text production analysis.

The power of agency in production of satire

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3 New media are of course in many ways conflating the roles, but in traditional media the role are still separated giving only very limited power over the text production over to the audience.
4 Vestergaard uses Giddens’ structuration theory (1984) as the main theoretical approach in an article discussing media system theory. Systems are seen as dependent on agency. When human agency acts the structural properties (e.g. rules and ressources) of media systems are used, and finally these systems change.
Apart from these theoretical benefits to text production analysis I have tried to argue so far, socio-cognitive reception theory is still rudimentary and still very theoretical with few empirical studies to its name. Further more, to my knowledge, it has not been used in text production studies yet. But as an approach it needs to develop an interest in understanding the actual mediating and change producing powers of agency in the production processes of different genres if we want to understand how professional ideologies change. As a point of departure, it is noticeable that media producers themselves have an awareness of the different kinds of human agency needed in production of different genres. In a series of publication from the Danish public service institution DR on the status, developments and challenges in different television genres the focus is on comedy production. The power of human agency in sketch-comedy is emphasised compared to other comedy genres also very dependent on the creative talent:

    (…) the genre is tremendously anarchistic. Sarcasm, irony, parody and farce can be mixed (…) sketch comedy has a special kind of humour often the comedians own (…) is 100% dependent on the sustainability of the idea and the comic talents of the performers (…) The idea is the main ingredient of sketch comedy. That is the reason why as a general principle sketch comedy needs time to develop and work on ideas and permission to carry them out. (Programkvalitet II. 2000:112, translated from Danish by HB)

In order to develop this genre and agency sensitive approach to production analysis a step further, inspiration from cultural anthropology might be fruitful. Holland et al (1998) introduces the concept ‘figured worlds’ in their informative analysis of the mediating powers of agency in the social production of identity and most importantly, social change. Based on a critic of Bourdieu for not being detailed enough in his analysis of the powers of agency in specific fields (Holland et al. 1998:59) they incorporate an approach based on the social psychology of Vyogotsky as well as on Bakhtin’s understanding of literature and language. The aim is to focus on the cultural and social world as personal rather than automatic, and to better understand how social change happens. The focus is on the social changing powers of human imagination, manifest in play and creative improvisations, and these are seen as fundamental human competences permeating cultural life.
The object of change is very much these collectively reproduced and socially shared fields framing the imagination and creativity of the individual participant. Holland et al. uses the term ‘figured world’ to stress the mental and value based dimensions of specific fields, and they define them as follows:

By “figured world”, then, we mean socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significances is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. (…) These collective “as-if” worlds are socio-historic, contrived interpretations or imaginations that mediate behavior and (…) inform participants’ outlooks. (ibid 52)

Using ‘figured world’ as a term to think with, the aim is to generate narratives on the forces and the practises, on the actors and important events with in the ‘world’ forming and influencing the value orientations of the professional ideology. Further more, according to Holland et al. artefacts play a crucial role in figured worlds because they can be seen as the means by which “figured worlds are evoked, collectively developed, individually learned and made socially and personally powerful” (ibid 61). In the production study of television satire the artefacts are understood as different kinds of media texts: Programmes that constitutes the genre tradition, the inspiration from an international media culture and the concrete programmes being made by the producers. How the producers evaluate these different kinds of text will be important to the study. Finally, Holland et al. point to the paradox that the imaginary powers central to building these figured worlds also hold the power to change them. They use different cases from anthropological studies to illustrate this. A very persuasive case is about groups of young Nepalese women participating in traditional song writing and performance rituals. These songs, however, envision a new world of gender relations in Nepal. By participating in these women’s groups “individual women find a place to stand, a perspective on themselves and their lives not otherwise offered in the texts and rituals of their daily lives” (ibid 64). The transformative powers of the producers of television satire are different in quality, but probably not in the recursive mechanisms involved, and the evaluations of these mechanisms by the individual will be important to the study.

More over, the interest in the powers of agency in this study of television satire also makes topical the analytical position of the researcher as well as the question of intentionality well known to literary criticism:
Texts are not to be seen as transparent signs of the intentions of the author – the so-called intentional fallacy. Indeed, texts are to be analysed, as objects of interpretations open to the interpretations of others, for example media researchers doing production studies. In turn, these interpretations might influence the media producers. An example of this ongoing interpretation process is, that my production analysis has no doubt made the producers of satire more aware of the developments of the genre. In every interview made so far with commissioners, editors, writers and producers the interviewee tells me this directly. This awareness could affect the way the satire tradition develops in the future, and consequently the researcher becomes a co-constructor of his/her own research object in a very literal way.

**Concluding remarks**

The theoretical perspectives presented above aims at supporting a more communicative and media centric approach to empirical productions analysis. By using the insights gained from a socio-cognitive approach to media reception in combination with an enhanced interest in the power of agency in media production I hope to gain a more genre sensitive approach to the changing professional ideology framing television satire. By doing so the aim is first of all to better understand the causalities between the conditions of the production and the actual products offered on different screens specific to genres. That is to achieve a more genre specific understanding of how production processes in the media interplay with the media systemic context where competition, technological changes and media political initiatives is producing specific media product and changes with in them.

Secondly, the aim is to avoid generalisations from the results gained from the vast and growing amount of news production studies to television production per se. A few studies have indirectly made the dangers of that very clear by pointing to the many differences between the production modes of important factual genres. For example, Grindstaff’s work on the production of daytime talk shows (1997) is an eye-opening study on how carefully constructed these shows are in the preproduction phase in order to reach the dramaturgic climax in the programmes. Kjus’ work on producing a Norwegian version of the reality show-format “Great Britons” (2007) shows, how new factual entertainment genres and new media are used by NRK trying to enhance and reformulate programmes on national culture. Further more, Frandsen’s work on the production of the Olympics 2000 (2003) shows how an international sport event is produced for a national audience
during a very short time period. At the moment a new wave of news production studies are being done because of the important new questions raised by 24-hour-news channels and especially new media changing the way news are produced. More over, many television formats are transforming into cross-media formats in the digital future using the new media platforms. The challenge for production analysis is therefore to gain insight into the specific and probably genre relevant ways this is being done also in other genres than news (Bruun, 2007). Different kinds of factual entertainment and entertainment genres have been given very little interest in spite of the cultural impact of these genres. Finally, a more communicative and media centric approach to production studies could lead to a profound interest in the function and importance of genre in cultural production and reception processes relevant to media research in general.

References


