

PREVIOUSLY ON

“There has to be something to think about” – The appropriation of quality TV series as a means of distinction

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Introduction: television series have become “good taste”

TV series are a topic at academic conferences as well as at student parties and in the feuilletons of German newspapers. Suddenly in academic circles it seems to be chic to watch television. Even watching several hours of television per day is not regarded with suspicion but greeted with enthusiasm – even in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Kämmerlings 2010). The appropriation of TV series has become a sign of “good taste” and contributes to the social and cultural distinction of its recipients.

Here, in the tradition of Cultural Studies, the recipients of media texts are not seen as passive victims of the media but as active creators. They actively appropriate media and media texts and allocate meaning to them. Appropriation goes beyond the actual context of reception and includes every action and experience connected to TV series. Therefore, the appropriation of TV series is a cultural practice which is located in the everyday lives of the recipients. In this way, it contributes to their social and cultural distinction.

The recent research-grounded discourse about TV series focuses on so-called quality TV or the quality TV series. They are often ascribed some kind of normative “quality”, which distinguishes them from other media texts. The recipients of these TV series are also being researched. These so-called quality viewers are the focus of this study, too. More precisely, this study concentrates on the academic recipients of US-American quality TV series in Germany, or in short: Intellies. The Intellies have developed certain patterns of appropriation of quality TV series which, for them, underline how special their appropriation is and therefore contribute to their distinction.

Research to date: quality TV series and quality viewers

In outlining shortly what a quality TV series is it becomes clear how they can contribute to the distinction of quality viewers.

What is a quality TV series?

There is no fixed definition of quality TV series, yet. However, there is a widely held consensus that these series are special with regards to content and production. Robert Thompson said as early as 1996: “[P]eople just seemed to know it when they saw it” (12f). He defines twelve characteristics of quality TV series or quality TV as he calls it. These include, for example, the fact that quality TV has more complex scripts than other TV series, that it treats more controversial topics, and that it attracts a more highly educated audience (Thompson 1996: 13ff). As of today, Sarah Cardwell defines quality TV series as encouraging their audience to interpret and evaluate the programme in order to enable “active discovery and ongoing reflection” (2007: 30). According

to Cardwell, these features cannot be found in other television texts such as soap operas or sitcoms. Also, Cardwell underlines the high production values and a “certain sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative, camerawork and editing” (Cardwell 2007: 26). For her, quality TV series show “a sense of stylistic integrity, in which themes and style are intertwined in an expressive and impressive way” (Cardwell 2007: 26). Like Thompson, Cardwell defines quality TV without an empirical background, apparently based on a general observation. Up to now, this is characteristic for the discourse about quality TV series. It shows the importance of empirical research in this field.

Two factors are regarded as crucial for quality TV in its present form: the legislative changes by the US-American Telecommunications Act and the technological changes brought about by digitalization. Because of the Telecommunications Act, competition shifted from the mass to micro-cultures “to busy professionals who select the best entertainment for their limited leisure time” (Nelson 2007: 44). Sascha Seiler stresses: Without the restrictions of the networks, it is possible to work as freely as in film or in novels – linguistically as well as thematically (Seiler 2008: 7). And the current TV series do treat a wide array of topics: from the double life of a serial killer (*Dexter*), via the co-existence of men and vampires (*True Blood*), to life in the 1960s (*Mad Men*), to enumerate just a few.

This shift of the programme focus has been accompanied by the development of digital technologies. These have “blurred the boundary between film and television in terms of both production processes and technical quality of product” (Nelson 2007: 43). As a result, quality TV series have developed an aesthetic dimension which is comparable to the visual aesthetics of cinema. Therefore, quality TV series attract a special kind of audience: “Select groups feel themselves to be distinctive in culture and thus choose cultural goods (of all kinds) to affirm their status” (Nelson 2007: 44). As cultural goods of cultural value, quality TV series reaffirm the habitus of certain recipients by being different from “common” television texts and other media texts.

The critique of the quality TV discourse starts from this point: in the eyes of the critics, the focus should be less on differences regarding the form or content of quality TV series in comparison to other television texts. Rather, the important question is that of the recipients of such TV series, who position themselves as quality viewers by appropriating them.

What is a quality viewer?

The current research-grounded discourse about quality TV series is mostly concerned with the “quality” which is supposed to be characteristic of these TV series. However, the idea of what constitutes “quality” is culturally constructed and therefore dependent on time, place and context. Therefore, discourses about “quality” are mostly legitimization discourses which negotiate what is socially acceptable or desirable.

In this way, concepts about what constitutes “good taste” are “not natural or universal; rather, they are rooted in social experiences and reflect particular class interests” (Jenkins 1992: 16). Taste,

then, becomes a means to maintain social distinction and forge class identities. By a certain taste recipients position themselves as members of a certain class, because “taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others” (Bourdieu 1984: 56). Thus, taste as well as the notion of what constitutes “quality” or “art” is shaped by power structures. Therefore the dichotomy of the alleged “high culture” in contrast to the alleged “culturally worthless” is closely contested. In this regard, it is not arbitrary what recipients choose to watch but rather is determined by their habitus: It is not an individual decision which TV series one likes but a decision which is made according to one’s position in society.

The discourse about quality TV series is therefore mainly a discourse about whether it is now acceptable for academic circles to be watching television or, more specifically, to enjoy watching TV series. Thus, the label “quality TV series” or “quality TV” says more about the recipients than about the media texts themselves. Cardwell (2007), for example, is of the opinion that the recipients of quality TV are more activated by quality TV than those who watch non-quality TV: “It also places the viewer into the active position that one takes up when making a critical judgement” (Cardwell 2007: 27). Nowadays, quality TV series are considered to be “high culture” and therefore it is justified to engage with them intellectually.

In this way, the reception and appropriation of quality TV series becomes an accepted cultural praxis. There is no longer any need for the self-ironic attitude which is usually taken up or even expected when educated members of the middle class admit to watching soap operas or reality shows (Bury 2008: 195). For example, the recipients of quality TV series no longer have to distance themselves by making fun of the TV series, as was the case with *Dallas* (Ang 1985: 97). Now, even academics do not have to out themselves bashfully as recipients of TV series but are actually able to rhapsodize about quality TV series.

In this way, quality TV actually creates quality viewers, such as by showing that they “recognize and appreciate the aesthetic standards of the quality text [...] such readers/viewers mark themselves out as legitimate members of the cultured middle class” (Bury 2008: 195). The discourse about quality TV series is therefore a discourse about the legitimacy of actually enjoying TV series without distancing oneself emotionally and intellectually. But which patterns of appropriation are created by this kind of reception? Four distinct patterns have been discernible in the qualitative appropriation study at hand.

Research design: qualitative guideline interviews

The data basis of the study at hand comprises ten qualitative interviews based on a guideline. The qualitative method was chosen as there was only very little insight into the appropriation of recipients of recent television series at that time. For an explorative study the methodology used should not resort to hypotheses which are devised *ex ante* (Keuneke 2005: 254). Also, the recipients should have the possibility to explain the context of their reception of TV series themselves. With a standardized method this would not have been possible.

The guideline combined mostly theoretical considerations relating to the following topics: serial biography, reception contexts in everyday life, identity and identification, construction of meaning, changes concerning reception and appropriation, deterritorial collectivisations, positioning towards fan culture, intertextual connections and appropriation, ownership in connection with TV series, formal aspects of TV series, as well as demographic data such as age, profession or education.

26 potential interviewees responded to notices placed via e-mail, in video rental shops and on bulletin boards on Facebook and StudiVZ. In all the notices the term “fan of TV series” was used to try to verbalize the notion that people with a certain amount of expertise in TV series were wanted.

On the basis of theoretical sampling (Krotz 2005: 192) five men and five women were selected and interviewed. The interviews took place mostly in the homes of the interviewees and were conducted between November 2009 and January 2010. The interviewees comprised a pupil, a high school graduate who was doing an internship as a midwife, four students of different subjects, a child therapist, a media designer, a policeman and a university lecturer. The interviewees were between 17 and 41 years old, with the 17-year-old pupil and the 41-year-old university lecturer being the youngest and oldest respectively. All the other interviewees were between 22 and 32 years old.

In comparison to the other interviews, the interviews with the pupil and the university lecturer differed greatly in content and progression. While the pupil was much less reflective than the other interviewees, the university lecturer was even more reflective. These two interviews were so completely different in comparison to the others that they were not included in the analysis.

Therefore, the basis for the following analysis is eight qualitative guideline interviews, each approximately one hour long. The interviews were transcribed literally. Afterwards, they were coded first openly and then axially as defined by Grounded Theory.

Analysis: four patterns of appropriation

The Intellies’ appropriation of TV series is distinguished by four patterns: the Intellies judge series critically, they watch them beyond the medium of television, they actively shape the context of reception, and they experience the series’ world emotionally.

Judging TV series critically

As academic recipients it is important for the Intellies to engage with series intellectually. In the interviews, they often stress how important an active appropriation is to them. Furthermore, they have a very clear idea about the “quality criteria” a TV series has to meet: series should be thematically special, emotionally realistic, intelligently funny, narratively surprising, as well as aesthetically demanding. These criteria are strikingly similar to the criteria described by Thompson (1996) and Cardwell (2007). There seems to be a consensus about what constitutes “quality” in TV series.

For the Intellies thematically special means different from the everyday routine. Series have to offer something new, otherwise “one can just simply go out on the streets” and dispense with watching (Jonas, 26, biology student). That means the Intellies expect more than entertainment from the TV series: “There has to be something to think about; something to philosophize about a bit” (Simon, 23, physics student). Hence, the Intellies ask for just the kind of activation which Cardwell claims to be characteristic of quality TV series.

Like Ien Ang (1985) showed with recipients of *Dallas* the Intellies find it important that series are emotionally realistic. This does not exclude exotic settings. The rest, however, should be “like it is in real life” (Christoph, 30, policeman). This also means that characters should not be too perfect as this is perceived as being artificial: “Well, they were so funny and quick-witted, nobody could ever really be like this” (Elisabeth, 32, child therapist). For the Intellies, series have to remain emotionally comprehensible. As a genre the TV series convince them as they get to know the characters intimately because “over time one just knows exactly what the person is thinking” (Nina, 24, meteorology student). If a series is emotionally realistic, the Intellies like being swept away and to “dive into their world. That’s the great thing about it” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). This other world is as if they would “observe a parallel world” (Nina, 24, meteorology student).

This parallel world is, as the Intellies say, intelligently funny. That means “I don’t really fancy crap like slapstick and everyone getting one on the nose” (Christoph, 30, policeman). Rather, the Intellies expect some kind of bizarre humour which is “just a little bit different” (Simon, 23, physics student). Thus, TV series should distinguish themselves by a humour which appeals to the Intellies intellectually.

The Intellies also expect a quality TV series to be narratively surprising. They do not tolerate redundancies: This “is something which is dull and stupid and I don’t LIKE it” (Christoph, 30, policeman). Therefore, series do not get better with time in the eyes of the Intellies. Quite the contrary, they count on TV series to worsen: “I have never experienced a series which didn’t decline, which didn’t get worse” (Elisabeth, 32, child therapist). Hence, they are happy if a series comes to an adequate end: “Yes, the great thing is if a story has been established over the course of a season and the character FINALLY finds the solution or does what he should have done ages ago” (Jonas, 26, biology student). Therefore, the Intellies are happy when a series ends – even if they really liked it. As soon as a series is suspected of only being continued to “milk the audience” (Elisabeht, 32, child therapist), e.g. for commercial reasons, the distinguishing feature is lost for the Intellies and with it the opportunity for personal distinction. As a result the Intellies stop watching the series.

The Intellies follow TV series because “it is fun to watch this” (Maren, 28, media designer). And a lot of this fun depends on the aesthetic appearance of the series. They like the way in which US-American quality TV series are aesthetically demanding; they like the look of the series. Also, music plays an important role “in order to empathize [...], just to let go, [...], that causes a feeling within oneself” (Maren, 28, media designer). Hence, music enables the Intellies to dive even deeper into the parallel world of the series.

In terms of these aesthetic aspects the Intellies do not approve of German TV series. None of the other criteria are met either. On the contrary: for the Intellies German TV series are thematically average, emotionally cliché, flatly funny, narratively foreseeable, as well as aesthetically boring. Hence, it is not surprising that the Intellies do not watch German TV series.

Receiving TV series beyond the medium of television

The Intellies do not only turn away from German TV series. German television as a medium does not play a role for the Intellies anymore. This corresponds with the notion that watching television is not fashionable for recipients of a certain habitus. The cable channel Home Box Office (HBO) angled a whole campaign in this direction and was able to profit “from cultural snobbery around television as it sets out to appeal to the college-educated audience who supposedly do not watch TV” (McCabe/Akass 2008: 85).

However, for the Intellies there are also practical reasons to turn their backs on the medium of television: firstly, most of their series are not on German TV. Secondly, the Intellies generally prefer to watch their series in English. And thirdly, it is important to the Intellies to determine their rhythm of reception themselves. Therefore, their medium of choice for the reception of TV series is the Internet.

Only very few quality TV series make it onto the German television screen. Mostly, “they do not run here. Or they start and then they cancel them again” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). This frustrates the Intellies and it is this frustration which makes them watch TV series on the Internet. Quickly, they turn away completely from the medium of television: They find new series on the websites from which they download the series or where they watch them as online streams. They watch these new series on the Internet again. Also, they find all of the additional offers connected to TV series online, for example bulletin boards or background information on the actors. In the process of appropriation television no longer plays a decisive, or indeed even any, role for the Intellies. This development is favoured by the fact that the Intellies are Internet-savvy. This might also be a reason why the Intellies are aged from approximately 20 to 35. Even though the Intellies have not grown up with the Internet, they have learned to use it to their advantage and feel at ease browsing the web for the information they need.

Furthermore, the Intellies find it very stimulating to watch the series in its original language, e.g. English. As it is not so common in Germany to speak or understand English fluently, this heightens the means of distinction for the Intellies. However, for the Intellies the perceived main reason is that too much is lost in translation: “Mostly, it is translated horribly. Especially funny things do not translate well into German” (Jonas, 26, biology student). In German the series loses its witty humour which the Intellies appreciate so much. Also, in the eyes of the Intellies, the TV series lose authenticity when translated. Thanks to their high level of formal education the Intellies rarely have problems watching TV series in English. On the contrary: “I think my English has become much better because of watching so many series” (Jonas, 26, biology student).

Because of this perceived educational value, it is even more legitimate for the Intellies to watch TV series.

It is also important to them that their reception of TV series is not determined by the broadcasting rhythm of television channels. The Intellies want to maintain control over when and where they watch TV series. However, they have to succumb to one constraint: the constraint of seriality because “if I know that there’s a new episode, then I do have to watch it immediately. I just couldn’t stand to wait another day” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). Hence, the Intellies can choose when or where to watch but they still want to know what will happen next.

That is why they have developed another strategy of reception which alters fundamental principles of the series: some TV series are no longer watched when they are new and airing for the first time but when they have been broadcast in full or even terminated. In this way “I can decide how much I watch on one day” (Sven, 24, sociology student). The Intellies download whole series and are technically able to watch a series in one week which aired over three years originally. This method of reception changes the perception of series because “some series do not stretch over years anymore but only over one or two months until I am through with them” (Maren, 28, media designer). Thereby the emotional connection of the Intellies to the series diminishes. The action of reception, however, becomes a more intensive experience as it enables the recipients to watch for hours at a stretch.

As the Intellies obtain TV series with the help of the Internet and watch them on their computers, this affects the way in which they shape their reception context.

Shaping the context of reception

The appropriation of series takes place in a personal and private space of experience for the Intellies. Here, they are able to actively shape the context of their reception in various respects: they can choose the place of reception, timewise the reception marks the change from work to leisure and the Intellies can choose what they want to watch according to their mood.

When the Intellies watch series, they sit in front of their computers. This is true for those who watch live streams online as well as those who download them illegally from file hosting services because “for me it is too laborious to burn them on DVD or something like that” (Sven, 24, sociology student). Therefore, their computers or laptops are the centre of the reception of TV series. An additional advantage of the laptop is that the recipients can take them into bed with them. The Intellies do that sometimes “especially if it is just before going to bed” (Simon, 23, physics student). In this way, the reception of TV series becomes very private: “For me it’s just like the book you read in the evening when you go to bed and want to relax” (Sven, 24, sociology student). The laptop on which the series is received enters into a space which used to be reserved for books. Like reading a book the reception of TV series stays private even if the Intellies share their flat with other people.

For the Intellies it is normal to watch series on their own. They only make exceptions for those

who are very close to them, for example flatmates, siblings or partners. The shared reception of series connects them; it “improves the spirit of the flatshare” (Jonas, 26, biology student). However, not every series qualifies for a shared reception because “some episodes I very much like watching by myself” (Maren, 28, media designer). In general, watching TV series is still private for the Intellies and they prefer it like this because it is a space where they have time for themselves. This is especially valuable to them as they have very little leisure time and are working in professions where leisure and work often merge – especially if they are still students.

Therefore, the series mark the end of the working day for the Intellies. They watch series “when I am done with all my stuff” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). When everything is finished, the TV series are good to “let the day ease down” (Sven, 24, sociology student). Often it is important to the Intellies to watch more than one episode at a stretch “because it is made in a way that one wants to know how it continues” (Simon, 23, physics student). Thus, the feeling of being in a “parallel world” (Nina, 24, meteorology student) is prolonged: a world which is not only a fictive world for the Intellies but a space that they can come home to.

It is especially handy for the Intellies that they can choose on a daily basis which world they want to come home to. Depending on their mood they choose from their repertoire of series which new episode they want to watch. On a strenuous day they do not choose strenuous series like *Dexter* because “he kills people in the nastiest ways” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). This is “sometimes too nerve-racking” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). After a strenuous day the Intellies do not want to dive into just any parallel world.

Altogether, the series’ world becomes a private space for the Intellies to withdraw from their everyday lives. This privacy is important for them to be able to experience the series emotionally.

Experiencing the series’ world emotionally

The key to the Intellies’ appropriation of TV series is the emotional experience. That means they do not only analyse series on an intellectual level but they also allow for emotions. This distinguishes the Intellies from an aesthetic distancing which is, after Bourdieu (1984: 34) characteristic of the (academic) middle or upper class. According to this view, which is also called bourgeois aesthetics (Jenkins 1992: 18), upper class recipients do not feel empathy for the characters of a media text. Rather, they analyse the form of a TV series and compare them to other media texts such as other series, plays or even films.

The Intellies do analyse the TV series. However, there is also a level of emotional experience perceptible. This emotional experience becomes apparent in three different respects: firstly, the Intellies are involved emotionally when watching TV series. Secondly the appropriation of TV series goes beyond the reception itself: there are consequent activities which follow the reception. And thirdly, the Intellies perform identity work related to series.

While watching TV series the Intellies experience the emotions of the series’ characters. They are emotionally involved: “Well, if one puts oneself into their position, then, of course you are

angry about things, or happy about things” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). It is important to the Intellies that they can allow for and enjoy this emotional experience. However, it is also very important to them that this emotional experience remains an “instant feeling”: “It does not stay with me for the whole day” (Nina, 24, meteorology student). In the interviews, they make it very clear that they limit their feelings to the reception situation.

For the female Intellies these feelings can become very strong. They do not have a problem with admitting that they often cry while watching TV series. This is different for the male Intellies: “Well, if something sad happens, of course you are concerned. I think they do that on purpose but it’s not like I burst into tears or something” (Sven, 24, sociology student). They can admit to feeling concerned but they draw a line at crying. However, that the male Intellies do not cry does not necessarily mean that they experience the series less emotionally than the female Intellies. It is possible that other cultural conventions become apparent here, e.g. “boys don’t cry”. Also, the gender of the interviewing person could have played a role; maybe they did not want to admit to a woman that they cry when watching TV.

In general, all the Intellies set very strict rules for themselves about the boundaries of their emotional involvement. If a season or a series comes to an end, they are sad. However, it is “not like I am totally devastated” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern). The Intellies do not allow the series to cause too many emotions compared to “real” events in their lives.

After the actual watching the consequent activities related to the TV series prolong the emotional experience. Among others this is one of the features which distinguishes the Intellies as fans of the genre television series. They already have accumulated an impressive knowledge about series and share this knowledge with others. Therefore, they can be classified as “tourists” in relation to the typical career of a fan (Winter 1995: 170). The consequent activities include reliving the emotions on their own, reliving them with others, as well as other actions concerning series.

For the Intellies it is important to share their series with others: “You just look for like-minded people in order to talk about it with them” (Lina, 22, midwifery intern) because only like-minded people understand the allusions the Intellies use. In the eyes of the Intellies such jokes or quotations only aim at fostering understanding with like-minded people: “I would not quote a series just because I thought the things someone said were especially clever” (Nina, 24, meteorology student). These allusions are a code which ensures the counterpart that they share the same inside knowledge. Thus, it strengthens the feeling of togetherness and the perception of distinction.

This shared reliving is very important for the Intellies: “Well, sometimes I got on my friends’ nerves until they started watching the series” (Nina, 24, meteorology student). If there is really nobody in the vicinity who enjoys watching TV series, bulletin boards fill this gap: “if I read the things that other people post, then I have a feeling of reciprocity” (Elisabeth, 32, child therapist).

However, that the Intellies read bulletin boards does not mean that they also contribute to the discussion. On Facebook and StudiVZ for example they have joined groups for their favourite

series. Mostly, it is enough for them to have these groups posted on their profile: “Just to demonstrate that I like this series” (Maren, 28, media designer). With their membership in the group they show that they know the series and like it but they do not engage in further discussions. This demonstration of knowledge seems to be the main reason for the existence of many of these groups: “Well, there are a lot of them where generally nobody writes anything; which you only have on your wall to show: ‘Yes, I watch this series’” (Nina, 24, meteorology student). Like the inside allusions the Intellies share with other recipients of TV series this strengthens their affiliation with the collectivisations of fans of TV series. Certain TV series thus become a means of distinction in the social web of Facebook, etc. Comparable to a well sorted library the wall shows how well read and well watched the person is. In this way, series have become a part of the Intellies’ identity and have been integrated into their everyday lives. The series’ realities have become a part of their reality; they become a part of the Intellies’ hybrid media identity.

The Intellies search actively for parallels between their own lives and the lives which are displayed in the series. Depending on their thematic bias they see the same topics in the series which preoccupy them in their lives. For example Christoph (30, policeman) who concentrates on the friendship between men and draws parallels with himself and his best friend: “Honestly, *Scrubs*, these two, that’s just like Robin and me, being stupid [...] and talking rubbish” (Christoph, 30, policeman). Elisabeth, a child therapist, always analyzes the relationships between the characters. Also, she especially watches series which are thematically concerned with psychoanalysis or psychotherapy. The series *In Treatment* has actually helped her in her profession: “I thought it was fantastic, too, for my job. Because he was just great with psychological conversation technique and something like that you rarely experience, you know? Usually you’re not allowed to witness the therapy sessions” (Elisabeth, 32, child therapist). However, it is not only the parallels with their own lives which appeal to the Intellies.

They also like the way the series enable them to have experiences they would never have in “real” life: “doing nothing, just hanging around in a bar, cruising through the countryside on a motorbike, blasting away with a gun” (Jonas, 26, biology student). By watching the series the Intellies can participate in a life which appeals to them but which might never be their reality. Or they can experience relationships they probably would not want in their everyday lives:

He [*Dr. House*] is like this lone wolf, whom nobody gets and who won’t open up to anyone. And, I mean, well, as a woman you wish to tame a man like that, don’t you? (Laughing) Well, I would wish that. Of course, I would NEVER want that in real life but to imagine it, [...] that’s the fun part. (Elisabeth, 32, child therapist)

For the female Intellies it is important that there is always a man in the series who they fancy. For the male Intellies it is not important to have a woman they fancy, or at least they would not admit to that in front of a female interviewer. Other than that there was no perceptible difference between the emotional experience of the series’ world between male and female Intellies.

Conclusion: the appropriation of quality TV series as a means of distinction

TV series used to be “no-go areas” for academics. Now they are seen as a “new avant garde” (Martin Kluger in Kämmerlings 2010). The Intellies belong to a generation which handles computers with ease and is Internet-savvy. Although they have not grown up with the Internet they have appropriated it for their purposes. The Internet also affects their appropriation of TV series. With their flexible, often irregular working hours or as students it is not feasible for them to abide by fixed television schedules. Their reception, therefore, is as self-determined as possible.

The influence of the Internet also shows how they shape the context of their reception. The computer as the end device of the Internet is a private matter; the Intellies prefer to sit on their own in front of their laptops. They only sometimes allow those close to them like siblings, flatmates or partners to share the reception of TV series. Usually, the Intellies prefer to share their thoughts and feelings after the reception. In this way, they relive the series with others. Thereby, the series occupy the space that used to be occupied by a novel which was read before going to bed. Interestingly, the Intellies do not own a lot of DVDs of TV series, only very few selected ones. They are not interested in a display of their whole knowledge of series. The actual library with impressive classics is replaced by membership in groups on Facebook and StudiVZ. Like the library these groups make the Intellies’ knowledge visible – but only online. For young people living in the information era this makes sense.

The appropriation of TV series, especially of what they consider to be quality TV series, is marked by individuality and self-determination. This kind of appropriation makes it possible for the Intellies to experience the series emotionally. Only by feeling intellectually active and stimulated can the Intellies admit to their feelings concerning the TV series. They reject other media texts which do not meet their “quality standards”.

Their appropriation of TV series goes beyond the reception with consequent activities and identity work. In this way, the Intellies incorporate the series into their construction of identity and thereby deal with the topics and problems of their own lives. It is especially because the Intellies perceive the series to be “high culture” and “culturally valuable” that they allow them to occupy such a prominent place in their lives. Also, they allow themselves to draw parallels between the series’ characters and their own lives. This is not the case with series they do not label as quality TV, for which they feel obliged to keep an aesthetic of distance. Therefore, the perceived “quality” of the series is both the rationale and the requirement for the Intellies to experience the series emotionally. For them the quality TV series are emotionally realistic and reflect their attitude towards life. It is important to them that there is a widely held notion that these series are not “trash” but “quality”.

Whether the quality TV series actually exists or not cannot be answered here. There is still a lot of scope to empirically research the parameters which are perceived as constituting “quality”.

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