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## Long Night.

La TV pour la TV - Trip report from the Lange Nacht der Medienkunst in Baden-Baden, 2nd Nov. 2002

<http://www.tekka.net/01/?LongNight>

Taking part in the live-transmission of a TV show should be made an approved rite of passage for the media-generation. "All TV is a lie," says [SWR](#)-host Markus Brock at the beginning of the [lange Nacht der Medienkunst](#), part of the annual media art awards. A hand-picked collection of mainly media students is draped strategically across designer furniture. Then the cameras start rolling for a short interview that will be spliced into the live transmission about an hour later. If the illusion works, who cares if half the studio guests are projections on a blue-screen? We know what TV is. Don't we?

Tonight, however, the illusion doesn't work. When I view the video-recording the day after the lange Nacht, I see that Brock's thickly-powdered face is tired and worn and that his grin doesn't extend to his eyes, which stare unblinkingly. "Of course I'd rather be home in bed than work till past 3 am. But I'm sure we'll make it through the night. It'll be fun," Brock says before the show starts. He says it again during the show. "Don't worry," he says "and don't switch to another channel. We won't bother you with heavy art - only fun clips." But if people are willing to tramp through the backstreets of Baden-Baden, to sit for four hours on fancy but very uncomfortable felt-padded wooden boxes, or to stay at home on a Friday night to watch art videos, they're likely to be seriously interested in (and highly knowledgeable about) media art, the heavy stuff, aren't they? They're in earnest, even if the producers aren't.

In keeping with the presumed indifference of everybody involved, the videos that are shown to the TV audience in full-screen-mode are shown to the people in the studio on four or five screens scattered across the room; they hum and flicker in the background. While the feature-clips get streamed to TVs across Germany, the lights in the studio go down, and the crew gets busy. The

host, with a little fresh powder on his forehead, and the camera man walk to their next position, and the producer counts down the seconds till Brock goes on air again. After half an hour or so we have figured out that the call for participants with a real interest in media art who are willing to get actively involved in the show was part of the public relations buzz created around the program and the media art award. As we cannot see the clips, anyway, we use the breaks to walk around, gets drinks from the bar or go for a smoke in the drizzle outside. During the takes we are shifting and restless, trying hard not to fall asleep Brock sees his earlier apprehensions confirmed. It is surprising that faces drop in response to uninspired comments like "a smoking video even for non-smokers" (apropos of [Happy funeral](#) by Steffen Volz and Christian Schulz, 1993-winners of the audience award?)

A week later the "real" awards show, a preproduced program, embeds the clips in documentaries and interviews. It is almost as if the producers have taken both their subject and their audience seriously this time. Unfortunately, here at the lange Nacht the "interactive videogames" (in which an unnamed "artist" on a screen challenges the audience to hold its breath or hum a note longer than he can or to beat him in a game of paper, scissor, stone) elicited only embarrassed giggles and darting glances that try to avoid the camera. Standing in front of a TV audience puffing out its cheeks and trying to avoid the camera is clearly not Brock's idea of fun.

It would have been so easy to switch off the constant background hum and flicker of competing clips at least while the videos ran on TV. Showing those clips on a big screen to the audience in the studio would have given them the chance to react, applaud or boo, discuss among themselves and ask questions. Before the show the producer had asked us to do just this. But the breaks, the disregard for the featured videos, and the host who had eyes only for the camera quickly established an atmosphere that turned people into props -- the very people whose enthusiasm for media art might have crossed the screen to the "target" audience at home alone in their sitting rooms.

All TV is a lie, make-up and clever tricks that creates an illusion for the viewers at home. But this sense of artifice has come full-circle: the producers know that we know that they're only catering to demands they've created themselves. They're losing faith. Too bad it's not hitting afternoon talk shows first.

(c) Anja Rau

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