

The Past and Present Narrative Spaces of Slovak Television

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Abstract

Television, whether understood as a means of communication or as a mechanism participating in the process of distributing entertainment, disseminating information, or spreading education, has become an inseparable part of people's lives. People cannot imagine their existence without being either active participants or consumers of television's communication sphere. Watching television programmes certainly is an ordinary, daily activity for individuals living in post-modern, post-industrial, information-oriented societies. Individuals hardly realize the potential of television to create reality for its users and to influence the users' understanding of the created world surrounding them. They observe either consciously or unconsciously and potentially acquire not only information or facts, but also absorb values, attitudes, emotions, and behaviour models. Television brings facts, issues and problems that are not experienced by an individual directly. In the post-modern society the proportion of secondary, mediated, indirect information flow has grown to replace the direct, authentic experience of people. Mediation of this kind is a continuous activity involving both the movement of meanings between discourses and transformations of those meanings.

For post-modernism, narrative represents a fundamental element linking society, culture and the individual. Narrative is both a mode by which knowledge is distributed to a society by its media (but not only by media) and the natural, inner structure of discourses. As such, narrative is crucial in the discourse of television, primarily for the role it plays in structuring an individual's sense of reality. Television is narrative in its substance and narratives are present in both fiction and non-fiction genres (films, documentaries, news and sports programmes, commercials, reality shows...) available on television. At the same time, narrative plays an important role in acquiring profit by selling a television product. Televised narrative not only brings knowledge in the form of information, but also provides entertainment, a key element in the ideology of consumerism. Post-modern television has thus made entertainment an essential element not only in those genres clearly designed to be entertaining (like sit-coms and soap operas), but also in non-fiction programmes. By watching them the audiences enter an imaginary, fantasy world which allows them to escape from their perceived reality and enter a far more enjoyable, virtual world.

Naturally the discourse of television and all its elements are constantly influenced by the economic, political, social and cultural changes implemented in society. In this regard, not only the significant ideological, economic and social changes, but also technological innovations that have occurred in Slovak society since 1989 find their representation in the television discourses. This paper examines the changing status, functions, and discourses of Slovak television in a period spanning the last twenty years. It attempts to show that the narrative in television discourses is multifunctional. Narrative provides the tool for the programme to be constructed in an easily decodable way. It is also supposed to carry factual information as well, even though it is perceived as a form of entertainment or fiction. At the same time, the role of narrative techniques that are used in television is to establish the immediacy, reality and interactivity of the programmes. Thus, narrative engages audiences in the process of television communication.

1 Introduction. Information or Communication Tradition?

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, television remains among the most influential and decisive audiovisual media and its discourses replace to a large extent the direct, “authentic” experience of audiences. This paper attempts to examine how narratives of Slovak television discourses have been influenced by the significant changes that have occurred in Slovak society since 1989, leading to the fact that narratives are used as a tool to engage television audiences in the process of communication. In this research narrative is approached as a post-modern, post-industrial and post-structuralist phenomenon, as a mode of distribution of knowledge as well as the natural, inner structure of discourses (cf. Lyotard 1991; Baudrillard 1994; Huisman 2005).

The main aim of this paper is to illustrate how the information tradition has become less important and the Slovak television narratives in the past twenty years have seen a substantial rise of communication tradition in their construction. In other words, the information tradition that was so important for Slovak audiences at the end of the 1980s (when public-service television was the most significant information medium providing live broadcasts from strikes, meetings and discussion forums during the time of Velvet Revolution) has gradually receded and television narratives have come to be dominated by a communication tradition.

2 The Slovak Television Market since 1989. Ideological, Economic, Social and Technological Changes

The elementary functions of narrative to attract television audiences to the screens and to engage the television programme viewers in the process of communication, which can be observed in every element of the television communication process, are related to the ideological, economic and social changes, but also technological innovations that have taken place over the last twenty years in the Slovak cultural context. Their place is visible in the revised model of television communication originally designed by Stuart Hall (1980).

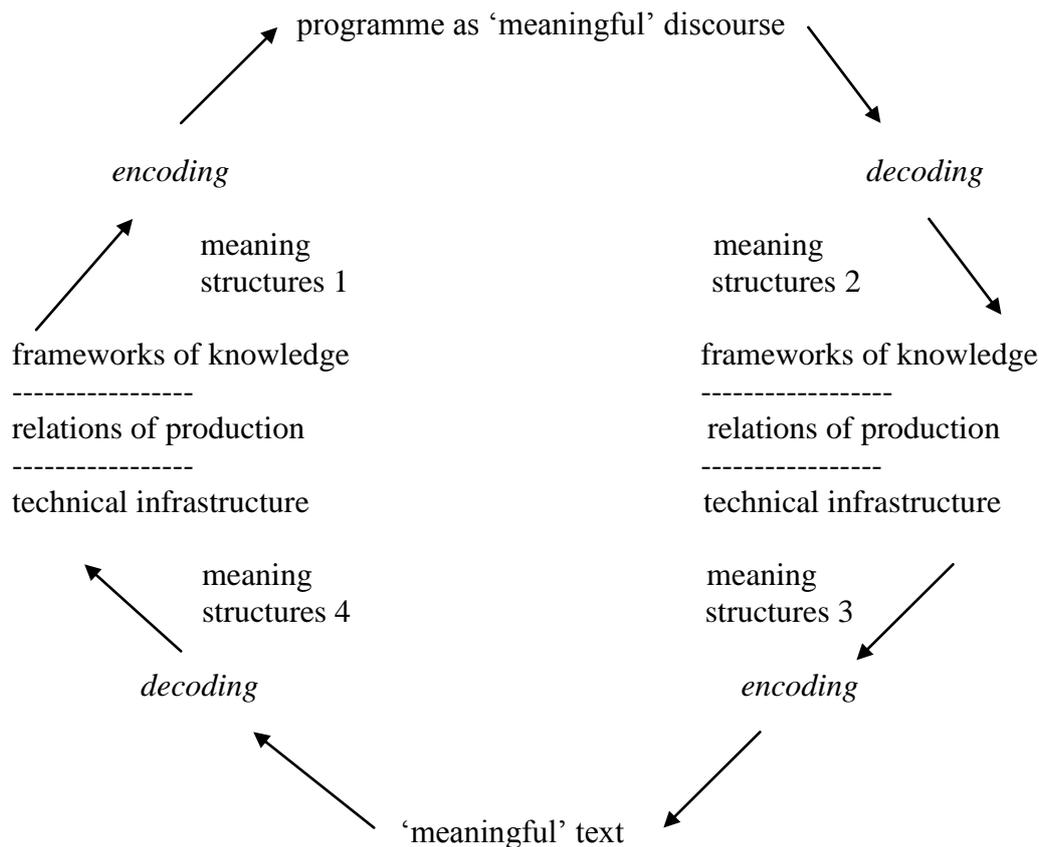


Figure 1 Television communication as a process of encoding/decoding (Hall 1980: 130)

In the process of encoding and decoding, the meaning of a television programme, the meaning of a construct, is created in an interaction between the text and its audiences. This interaction was dominated by common frameworks of knowledge, where the ideological changes of the early 1990s found their place. Marxism and its reflections in concepts of socialist and communist societies were during this period overturned and replaced by ideas of democracy, human rights and freedom. Thanks to the fall of all “media walls” between Western societies and Eastern European ex-Soviet block countries, Slovak television audiences had access to an enormous amount of previously inexperienced information enlarging their frameworks of knowledge with new political concepts, but also with a new social reality.

The relations between television production and consumption were influenced by such concepts as a free market, free enterprise and the ideology of consumerism. The media, both old and new, soon found that they were playing a very different role within a new social organization whilst revolutionary economic changes brought competition for the very first time to the Slovak television media market.

The 1990s added new, narrowcast, cable and satellite technologies to the already existing technical infrastructure of terrestrial broadcast. Formerly in state ownership, two national terrestrial television channels, namely *JEDNOTKA* (from 1993 - 2004 *STV1*) and *DVOJKA* (from 1993 – 2004 *STV2*), have been in the process of transformation from state-controlled to public service broadcasting (STV n.d.a). There had been no substantial alternative to them until August 1996 when a new national commercial channel, *MARKÍZA*, began its broadcasting (Markíza n.d.). Very soon, being considerably different from both STV channels in both narrative content and narrative form, the channel became known for its strong commercial orientation, Americanisation and pro-opposition bias (Tomaščíková 2002).

The first commercial television satellite channel was *VTV*, launched in April 2005. Covering two fifths of all households in Slovakia, it was originally meant to break the monopoly of STV, but it remained very similar to STV in both its programme structure and political affiliations. Moreover, *VTV*'s financial problems were solved by credits from the Ministry of Culture and so the life of *VTV* was rather short (*VTV* 2004-2009).

The first decade of the 21st century brought more television channels to the Slovak media market. Since 2001 there has also been a 17-hour-a day news and documentary service provider: the private news channel *TA3*. It is available via cable companies or satellite systems. A new national terrestrial television channel, *TV JOJ*, started competing with 'older' commercial partner *MARKÍZA* in 2002. Public service Slovak television introduced its third national channel (sports channel) –*TROJKA*– in 2008 and *TV JOJ* brought to life via cable or satellite its *JOJ PLUS* channel in the same year. A year later, *MARKÍZA* came with a new channel via cable or satellite –*DOMA*– in 2009. Moreover, there exists a number of regional, local and smaller town cable companies in different regions (for instance *TV SEVER*, *DCTV*, *OTF*, *VEGA*, *TV NAŠA*) whilst reference must also be made to the numerous Czech and Hungarian channels which are available to the Slovak audiences via terrestrial systems being supplemented by the increasingly diverse channel offer via satellite or cable networks (*mediálne.sk* n.d.).

The concept of the word 'mass' used in the context of mass media and mass communication is challenged as well. The view of pre-1989 audiences as a homogeneous mass of consumers of mass media products is no longer acceptable. The masses have become divided into smaller, less numerous groups exercising their increasingly individualised choices from the range of products distributed and delivered to them via terrestrial, cable, and satellite networks.

The two figures below show the 24-hour share in the Slovak television market for the week of 4 – 10 October 2010 and the prime-time share in the same week, respectively. The dominance of two commercial channels, *MARKÍZA* and *TV JOJ* (with a combined overall 55.5% share, reaching 60% in prime-time) as opposed to the relatively small 14 % share of public service STV is obvious.

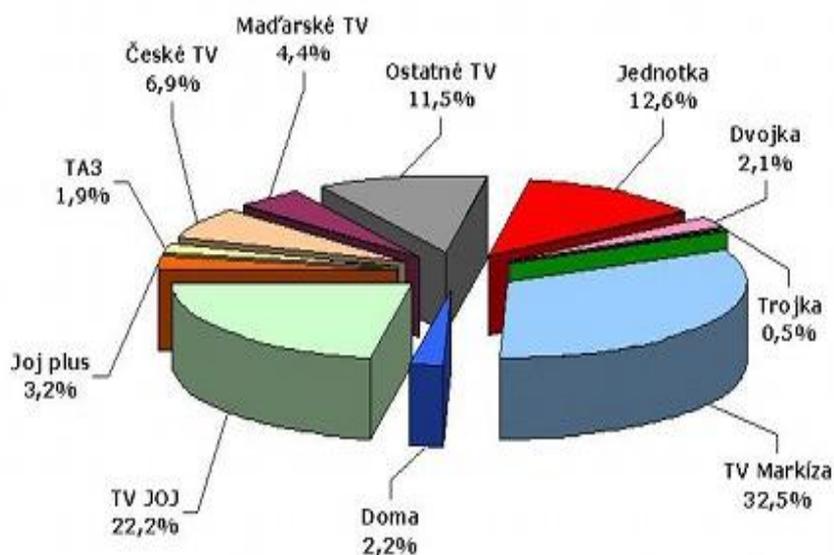


Figure 2 The 24-hour share on Slovak television market - week of 4–10 October 2010

Source: Odbor mediálneho výskumu a informácií STV [Section of media research and information STV], available at: <http://www.stv.sk/stv/press/podiel-na-trhu-40-2010/>

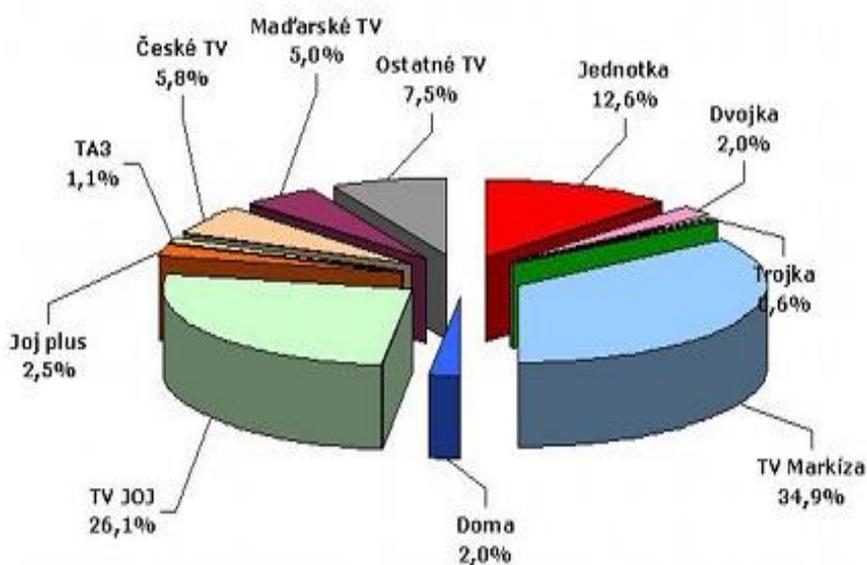


Figure 3 The prime-time share on Slovak television market - week of 4 – 10 October 2010

Source: Odbor mediálneho výskumu a informácií STV [Section of media research and information STV], available at: <http://www.stv.sk/stv/press/podiel-na-trhu-40-2010/>

Technological innovations of the 1990s not only affected Slovak television companies and other ‘old media’ but also brought the phenomenon of the Internet and new interactive media to the Slovak media scene (Aktuálne.sk 1999-2011). The extensive transformation of Slovak television broadcasting was accompanied by the loosening of government regulation, and the expansion of international media conglomerates. The end of the 20th century brought about much stronger market competition among all television companies. Television programmes, whether products of commercial or public service television, became commodities; as such they had to fight for their audiences to make a profit or justify their expenses. During the first decade of the 21st century the commercial imperatives became even more visible, which resulted in immense competition among channels for viewers’ attention, and a strong emphasis in entertainment values. The offerings were almost unlimited and ranged from films, popular television genres, and entertainment programmes, through a much smaller proportion of educational programmes, to documentaries and news bulletins. It was no longer up for the audiences to search for information, education and entertainment; it was the actual television companies that tried to attract audiences to their particular programmes.

If at the beginning of the 1990s Slovak television was clearly defined as a dominant information medium, and Slovak television audiences were active in searching for information, by the end of the 1990s television was already firmly established as a mixed information-and-entertainment medium for Slovak media consumers, as a form of both meaningful and pleasurable outlet, and so a carrier of both factual and fictional contents. In other words, by the late 1990s television was no longer a passive medium for the viewer. As the introduction of television polls and interactive programmes suggests, the audiences became firmly actively involved in communication process (mediálne.sk n.d.).

In 2011, the situation has changed –again: the search for information is no longer perceived as a need. Television audiences, radio listeners, periodical readers, internet users are bombarded by enormous amounts of information 24 hours a day. Opinion polls, surveys and research studies in television audience behaviour find that people search for information much less and their main goal is not to educate themselves but to be entertained. In order to ensure that they retain their appeal, television companies have moved on to make even

information entertaining, seeking the audience's direct involvement even within this particular audiovisual genre (see Onlineprogram.sk n.d.)

3 Changing the Narrative Spaces of Slovak Television News Journalism

Television news, if compared to print news, is widely yet wrongly perceived to be less mediated, more real, less constructed, more focused on information and facts. It is not generally viewed as a source of entertainment and drama by television audiences.

The narratives of Slovak television news programmes before 1989 were defined as informative, propagandistic, educational, regulatory and hedonistic. Back then, news journalism was concerned with the depiction of "Reality", argumentation, dissemination of the correct ideology, novelty, positiveness, continuity, and by and large could be said to have had an informative and institutional character. The production of news before 1989 was understood as a collective process, focussing on people, done for people (Tomaščíková 2010b).

Apparently, the change of the political system, as well as the character of the social processes after 1989, were immediately reflected in the news production strata. The philosophy, values, goals and principles of western journalism expanded into the developing mechanism of the Slovak news media journalism very rapidly, particularly in the cases of commercial channels. The major technological changes of the 1990s that found their reflection in the amount of news service offered to Slovak audiences subsequently created higher competition that spurred a rise in the proportion of entertainment elements in the primarily non-entertaining genre of television news, and the tendency continued in the first decade of the 21st century.

Indeed, the last two decades brought changes to the form, structure and organisation of the evening bulletins. From one evening news programme called *Televízne noviny* that used to be broadcast on both national channels of STV simultaneously, and one late night edition of the news programme *Ozveny dňa* (later *24 hodín vo svete*), special regional news bulletins were added in the 1990s. All new television channels then introduced their own news programmes into their programme structure. The emergence of specialized news and documentary television channel *TA3* led to the introduction of more news programmes into the programme schedule of most other television channels. Additionally, the availability of teletext and the almost unlimited access to on-line news services have substantially reduced

the importance of the main evening news bulletins (STV n.d.b). The present spectrum of Slovak television news services is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Terrestrial:

JEDNOTKA

- 5.45 am *Udalosti ČT* (Czech TV news programme, 30 minutes)
- 6.15 am *Správy STV* (STV news programme, 20 minutes)
- 4.00 pm *Správy STV o 16.00* (STV news programme at 4.00 pm, 15 minutes)
- 7.15 pm *Slovensko dnes* (STV news programme, regions, 15 minutes)
- 7.30 pm *Správy STV* (STV news programme, 25 minutes)
- 9.45 pm *Správy a komentáre* (STV news and news analysis programme, 25 minutes)

DVOJKA

- 5.35 pm *Regionálny denník* (STV regional news programme, 30 minutes)
- 7.30 pm *Správy STV* (STV news programme, 25 minutes)
- 7.55 pm *Správy – Hírek* (STV news programme in Hungarian, 5 minutes)
- 11.20 pm *Udalosti ČT* (Czech TV news programme, 30 minutes)

TROJKA – sports channel with no news service

MARKÍZA

- 6.00 am *Teleráno* (morning television including short news programmes, 2-4 minutes)
- 1.00 pm *Rýchle Televízne noviny* (news programme, 10 minutes)
- 2.55 pm *Rýchle Televízne noviny* (news programme, 5 minutes)
- 3.55 pm *Rýchle Televízne noviny* (news programme, 5 minutes)
- 5.00 pm *Prvé Televízne noviny* (news programme, 25 minutes)
- 5.55 pm *Rýchle Televízne noviny* (news programme, 5 minutes)
- 7.00 pm *Televízne noviny* (news programme, 45 minutes)
- 10.15 pm *Nočné Televízne noviny* (news programme, 20 minutes)

TV JOJ

- 5.45 am *Krimi noviny* (crime news programme, 25 minutes)
- 6.10 am *Noviny TV JOJ* (news programme, 25 minutes)
- 6.35 am *Krimi noviny* (crime news programme, 25 minutes)
- 7.00 am *Noviny TV JOJ* (news programme, 30 minutes)
- 7.30 am *Krimi noviny* (crime news programme, 30 minutes)
- 8.00 am *Noviny TV JOJ* (news programme, 30 minutes)
- 8.35 am *Promi noviny* (celebrity news programme, 30 minutes)
- 4.59 pm *Prvé noviny* (news programme, 30 minutes)
- 5.30 pm *Promi noviny* (celebrity news programme, 30 minutes)
- 7.00 pm *Krimi noviny* (crime news programme, 30 minutes)
- 7.30 pm *Noviny TV JOJ* (news programme, 25 minutes)

Satellite and cable:

TA3 (17-hour news, features, and documentaries in Slovak)

CNN, BBC World Service, etc.

DOMA – no news service

JOJ PLUS

- 7.00 pm *Krimi noviny* (crime news programme, 30 minutes)
- 7.30 pm *Noviny TV JOJ* (news programme, 25 minutes)

Figure 4 Broadcast news services in Slovakia in 2010

Figure 4 above illustrates the rising number of broadcast news services and their diversification in the period covering the last twenty years in Slovakia. At present, four terrestrial television channels in Slovakia broadcast news bulletins several times a day, and the satellite and cable networks offer one news and documentary channel in Slovak, whilst an additional two broadcast in English. The longest news bulletins are scheduled in the late afternoon slots (from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm) and in the early evening slots (from 7.00 pm to 8.00 pm). This supports the claim about the gradually falling importance of the main evening television news bulletins in the context of much wider offerings of news services provided during the day by terrestrial systems and by satellite and cable networks.

Each news programme has to fight for its audience in the very well supplied Slovak news media market. Market-driven journalists realize that their goal involves constructing news bulletin narratives in such a way that they are able to attract audiences. To draw the attention of audiences and to keep it throughout the news programme; in other words, to discourage the audiences from switching to another channel became very much a priority at the end of the 1990s when the news market became saturated and this has been reflected in the choice of both narrative content and narrative form in news programmes. As shown in Figure 4 above, many news programmes specialize in different “news subgenres” (e.g. celebrity news, crime news, regional news from regions of Slovakia or news broadcast in any of the country’s different minority languages). Some news programmes are very short and provide a “quick news service”. The tendency to have more specific rather than general news bulletins reflects the need to offer something “extra” to the audiences –and to offer it very quickly.

One of the visible outcomes of such efforts is the introduction of an increased amount of dramatic elements into the formerly information-centred news programme, which results in the “infotainment” character of both narrative content and form of current news productions. Thus, the combined provision of both information and entertainment rules all elements of the Slovak television news programme production process. The news becomes constructed on the borderline between information and entertainment and, as a result, more evidently than ever, between fact and fiction.

At the same time, the production of news programmes has to be economically efficient. In order to meet the strict economic requirements, television news producers use services provided by multinational agencies. In the case of foreign news items, the use of services provided by the agencies and the use of the Internet as the cheapest means of communication leads to the increasing uniformity of news narrative contents and to a certain schematisation

of the narrative form in which news is produced. On the other hand, the latest technological elements of satellite and digital systems allow instant mediation and the online presentation of selected events, thus creating the conditions for strong competition among news providers in terms of both actuality and novelty.

In order to engage the audiences in the process of communication and to keep them watching television news programmes the narratives are based on two main principles: immediacy and relevance. New technologies enable journalists to report closer to the real time of events which in turn allows audiences to see what is going on at the moment of viewing. In short, events may be observed through television news bulletins almost as they happen. Stuart Allan (1998) defines news in a post-modern, global context as news or views from “nowhere”, as an up-to-the-minute narrative (now) taking place on the spot (here) relevant to audiences, labelling the news sources as those reporting news immediately during the moment of its actual happening and from the location transmitted to audiences from anywhere to wherever the audiences are (Allan 1998: 105). Immediacy, instantaneity, and closeness are achieved mostly by the construction of a specific visual mode and the use of live interviews.

In order to attract audiences, television news texts should be easily accessible or “readerly” and, at the same time, they should be “open” (term introduced by Umberto Eco 1966) or “writerly” (term introduced by Roland Barthes 2004). Both terms, open and writerly, mean that the text is fragmented and carries characteristics of a process into which audiences can be invited. John Fiske (1987) states that a text which is both readerly and writerly can attract attention if it is also “producerly”, i.e. if it produces multiple reading possibilities, combines both factual and fictional modes of representation, and creates a collage of fragmented images (Fiske 1987: 94-105).

Among the elements supporting the producerly narrative character of Slovak television news programmes there is evidence of a shift towards the communication tradition in both the narrative content and narrative form of news programmes. Slovak television news narratives have become less political and the audiences of both public service and commercial news providers are engaged in the communication process by the appeal of social issues, private sphere elements and human stories while complex political and economic issues are mostly avoided. Entertainment and dramatisation result from the presence of soft news items, the trivialisation and sensationalisation of narrative content and a high proportion of negative (very often disturbing and disgusting) content requiring relevant narrative forms inspired by genres such as high drama and the feature essay. Entertainment, emotions, and negative elements are primarily carried by the visual mode, although the musical mode also enhances

the dramatic character of the narrative. The narrative mode becomes less elitist, the perspective of a common person is preferred, and greater attention is paid to the studio décor whilst highly personalised newsreading styles are generally preferred (Tomaščíková 2009a).

Narrative forms are characterised by an almost complete absence of not only the principle of relevance but also coherence. A news programme is a collage of events with a high level of fragmentation and a largely serialised narrative which allows for the same event to be reported throughout several programmes. This also results in an increase in the tempo of the programme, and a higher number of visual cuts and sound bites. These lead to the interrupted and fragmentary nature of visuals, which requires the constant attention of audiences (Tomaščíková 2009b).

Interactivity (widely blamed for the “death” of the information tradition) also plays a substantial role and can be seen in: promotion strategies applied in the form of regular short news-bites broadcast throughout the whole day; direct invitations from news producers for members of the audience to contribute with their own stories or to provide information about events in their neighbourhood; subtitles running at the bottom of the screen during other programmes highlighting the most recent events and therefore inviting audiences to watch complete items in one of the regular news programme; or the absent closures of television news programmes that are replaced by invitations for audiences to watch subsequent news programmes to be broadcast later (Tomaščíková 2010a).

Interactivity is further strengthened by carefully chosen narrative techniques, which make news stories more attractive. Since the late 1990s a linear technique clearly prevails, which allows audiences to follow the development of a story step by step. Consequently, the formerly dominant ‘inverted pyramid’ (lead-and-body) required by the information tradition is disappearing slowly. Personalisation often becomes a strong supportive element of the linear narrative technique, and both elements combined have led to the tabloidisation of hard news (Tomaščíková 2010b).

Interactivity is also achieved through the conversational character of a spoken mode of narrative construction. As stated elsewhere (Tomaščíková 2010b), this conversational character results from a careful selection of specific linguistic elements, namely predominantly colloquial vocabulary and idioms, the narrative present tense, the direct representation of other participants’ speeches, and even a fairly constant process of “interpellation” that results from the audience being addressed directly by newsreaders and correspondents/reporters alike. All these characteristics are examples of the gradual

movement away from the information tradition towards the communication tradition in television news discourse.

4 From the Past Ideological Bias to the Present Entertainment Narratives of Slovak Television Broadcasting

As stated above, television has gradually become one of the major entertainment providers in Slovakia. After a short period at the end of the 1960s characterised by a relative tolerance towards the works of western authors that were adapted for the small screen by Czecho-Slovak producers (*Svetová dráma na obrazovke* [World drama on TV screen] or *Svetový román na obrazovke* [World novel on TV screen]), stronger censorship dominated all aspects related to broadcasting until 1989. During the twenty years before 1989 most of the programmes aired in the country were produced by the Czecho-Slovak television industry, with Slovak productions representing 1/3 of the total. If any programmes were to be imported, these were restricted to television productions from the countries of the former Warsaw Pact. The leading role of the Communist Party was reflected in the narrative content and narrative forms. The general ideas of socialism and communism, images of the ideal citizen contributing towards the success of the latter, the leadership of working class... were present in all TV productions, including news programmes, which at that time were essential tools of propaganda (and so ideological manipulation). Discussion programmes, documentaries, educational programmes for children and youth, as well as entertaining genres were scheduled respecting the daily routine of their audiences (Tomaščíková 2005).

Discussion programmes were very much used as an extension of the propaganda disseminated through news programmes. Documentaries re/presented the myth of a super-hero successfully building a communist future in a socialist society and covered politically important periods of post-war history. Educational programmes underlined pro-Soviet attitudes by idealizing the lifestyles of various social groups. Socialist realism visibly dominated the serial format genres, the narrative content of which had to include a hero in everyday situations –a teacher, a shop assistant, the manager of a state-owned company, solving minor problems without difficulties. The narrative forms were uniform and so the space for creativity was very limited.

Rather successful, and also of higher artistic quality, series were produced as dramatisations of literary works by Slovak authors. Products that would be defined as light

entertainment prior to 1989 brought to the television audiences *Vtipnejší vyhráva* [The best joke-teller wins], a competition with censored, ideologically unmarked jokes, cabaret shows with short comic sketches, music and other artistic performances, ‘the best singer’ competitions, do-it-yourself competitions, and other similar features. The television production proper was supplemented by the broadcast of theatre performances, folk music and dance shows, classical music concerts and sport competitions (Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave n.d.).

The post-1989 period brought about changes not only to television news production (as described above) but also to the educational and entertainment functions of television, as understood by Slovak television companies. *STV* has generally intended to stand by the principles of public service broadcasting, seeing itself as national, independent information provider, but also as an educational and cultural institution, and as a modern electronic medium aiming at providing a full and broad reflection of life in a democratic, plural society. It thus aims at providing a service to the state by guaranteeing the right to serious, objective, unbiased information for its citizens, as well as fulfilling the needs and interests of the broadest possible audience (*STV* n.d.c). However, *STV* has been heavily underfunded in this new era and thus unable to produce and broadcast their own quality products. As a result, and in spite of numerous reshuffles, *STV* has not been able to perform its public service functions.

STV’s programme structure is a far cry from its public service ideals. There certainly is room for improvement as far as its journalism standards are concerned (shown in both its news and discussion programmes); it very rarely produces its own documentaries or children- and youth-oriented educational programmes, which are almost non-existent; and very much the same could apply to its own entertainment-oriented programmes. This state of affairs was summarised by *STV*’s new manager in 2008, who stated that his main goal was for *STV* to move away from the television-that-buys-and-broadcasts to the television-that-produces-and-broadcasts model; from the television-taking-care-of-ratings to the television-taking-care-of-its audiences model (*STV* n.d.a).

On the other hand, the new commercial television companies have been from the very beginning oriented towards quick profit; consequently, they have focused both their own production as well as their import programmes on popular television genres. These have safely brought the expected numbers of viewers to satisfy the needs of advertisers.

Such commercial imperatives, combined with the immense competition for the Slovak viewers’ attention, have strongly emphasised entertainment values and resulted in the fact that in the post-1989 years Slovak audiences have been mostly exposed to either imported

television programmes or else domestically-produced programmes with popular formats under licence from foreign production companies. In the last decade of the 20th century Southern American (mostly Argentinean and Mexican) *telenovelas* took over substantial morning and afternoon slots on both *STV* and the commercial channels. They attracted mostly female audiences of all age categories above fifteen with their “exotic” (i.e., un-Slovak) lifestyle narratives. What seems to have attracted the audiences was the chance to empathize with apparently ordinary characters onto which their individual frustrations could be projected, or who could otherwise represent dream-fulfilling stories of success. The insights into their lifestyles, the resulting comparison of different private spheres, as well as the emotionally heavy-laden scenes have so far proved able to involve audiences into the narrative, and numerous dramatising elements in both narrative content and narrative forms have resulted in the very high popularity of the genre, the effect of which is still visible today, at least to a certain extent.

In the same period imported American and British serials were placed to take the time slots on and around prime time. Unlike British situation comedies American sitcoms have had their stable prime time space in the programme structures of all Slovak television channels until today. In the first half of the first decade of the 21st century they also had to share the prime time slots with German crime drama series. To the strong entertainment element of humour in situation comedies the German crime series added the dramatic elements of tension and mystery. The audiences were mostly attracted by their negativity, disturbing visual images, or spectacular car crash scenes. The last five years have seen the decline of foreign comic genres on both *STV* and the commercial televisions and their space is being taken by an extensive choice of American crime drama and rather successful situation comedy produced in Slovakia (mediálne.sk n.d.).

Indeed, the last ten years of both public service *STV* and commercial television companies have been enriched by domestically-produced Slovak soap opera (although some examples are also imported from the Czech Republic) as well as by various reality shows. Reality television began with licensed formats of competitions, game shows and was later supplemented by docu-soaps, and even reality crime series that have been produced as original series. Most of the game and quiz shows, as well as various other competitions, retain their prime-time slots in weekend evenings, whereas this space is taken by the new reality crime series and docu-soaps on week days. Reality television genres incorporate almost all aspects of the communication tradition. They attract audiences by involving them in the narratives: the audiences can watch what is happening in a Big Brother bathroom, they cross

fingers for the participants in quiz shows and answer the questions with them, they cry with children winning or losing in talent shows. The seriality of not only reality genres but also all drama fiction (sitcom, soap opera, crime) makes audiences come back to their television screens again for the continuation of the story –or for a new story altogether.

5 Conclusion. The Information Tradition is Dead; Long Live the Communication Tradition!

Slovak television viewers, like their counterparts in the western world, have become active decoders of meaning, active communicators who may be amused whether they watch television news programmes, popular television genres, a western film, a live broadcast of a parliamentary session or a football match. In post-modern societies, the entertainment factor is present not only in those television genres like sitcom or soap opera (designed to be primarily entertaining) but has also become an inherent part of non-entertainment, non-fiction programmes. By watching them the audiences enter an imaginary, fantasy world which allows them to escape from their reality and enjoy the virtual one. The television industry manipulates individual topics, however serious, to become a source of entertainment. Thus the shift from the information tradition towards the communication tradition observed in the discourse of television news is also visible in other television genres, as this paper has aimed to show.

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