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TV AESTHETICS AS THE MESSAGE

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Abstract

Aesthetic resources of mass media have social determination. Aggressiveness is expressed not only in the acts of violence but penetrates all the aspects of audiovisual content. Aesthetic categories of "beautiful" and "ugly" forecast ethical ones of virtue" and "evil". After the strictness and positive style of the soviet TV and the energy of revolution and improvisation of the 90-s, TV acquired glamour, carnival and aggression as its main aesthetic characteristics. Despite of positive results demonstrated by modern TV projects, aggressive images, topics, dialogs, participants of talk-shows, models of behavior contradict all the moral declarations and social messages and destroy the positive intentions of the creators. Violence strategies and aesthetics create the real messages of the programs.

Key words: *TV aesthetics, conflict, dialog, talk-show, war-journalism, peace journalism.*

1. AESTHETICS AS A TV SENSE RESOURCE

Aesthetics is associated with sensual expressiveness of the art work form. Values and people attitude to the world reveal in the categories of "beautiful" and "ugly". As Iosif Brodsky stated in his Nobel Prize lecture "aesthetic reality defines ethic reality more exactly for a man… because aesthetic is the mother of ethics: ideas of "good" and "bad" first of all are aesthetical ones, they anticipate categories of "virtue" and "evil" (Brodsky 2006) This statement paradoxical at the first glance is rather closely connected with television communicative nature where content of the message depends not on *what* is said but most on *how* it is realized in aesthetics of audiovisual images. Modern TV is no more regarded in the context of art, though there were periods when the high quality feature production or TV theatre were the most interesting part of Russian broadcasting as it contained meanings and implications which were impossible in news or documentary (VIlchek & Vorontsov 1977; Guthrey 1962). TV theatre performances were addressed to the thoughtful audience; they were chamber, used close-ups, slow temp, considered accents correlated with the topics of the day. In such aesthetics the space of thought was created so that was sense and meanings of the text a watcher could focus on. Contemporary television shows aesthetics is also a guide of meanings and messages, but they can be far from the content which audience percepts rapidly, as a background, from the great number of various sources and has a lack of time and possibilities to understand them but can feel.

In such a case aesthetic message exactly reveals the real sense of the program despite of whether authors and producers realize it or not. Just with this feature of television information its unexpected effects are connected (Adamiants 1994, Rushkoff 1996, Adorno 2001, Harris 1999).

The hidden influence potential of TV was formulated by McLuhan in his famous "medium is the message", as he was fantastically exact in foretelling the future impact on the audience based on technological phenomenon of the new media. Since that time researchers used to treat television aesthetics as a technology derivative (Barker 1985). New technologies really bring many novelties in the process of editorial staff work, shooting, cutting, in the way of consumption of media products. The notion of the television text is changing rapidly including rich means of expression palette – audio,

video, moving words, animation, signs, collage, infografics and etc. Video quality changes with the usage of moving camera inside TV studio, mini cameras, stedicams, with their new creative possibilities of motion picture; professionals acquire new devices for information and image processing and transfer. As for the audience there is variety of watching TV modes – from small mobile phones to huge home screens. But technologies only propose possibilities for advanced search and realization of aesthetical tasks in accordance with the time, audience demands and for the sake of commercial success...

Simplicity, propriety, positivness were typical to the soviet TV which was substituted by aesthetics of riot, storm, improvisation, vivid life during early perestroika. In the 90-ties it turned to be aesthetics of aggression, struggle and suffering but by the beginning of the new century everything was formated gradually as vivid life was substitute with glamour, struggle turned to be carnival, sufferings are treated on TV as commodity and aggressiveness became one of the main characteristic features of television aesthetics. That is really surprising as the audience needs values and social optimism (Sidorov, Ilchenko, Nigmatullina 2009); TV manages to combine social need with commercial interests and replace social message.

2. AGGRESSION AS AN ACTUAL TREND IN TV CONTENT

Media researchers used to count the acts of violence the audience watch on TV during a day/ a week/ a year to prove the aggressiveness of contemporary TV (Dondurey 2007, Fedorov 2004, Federman 1997). Authority and society are anxious about the demonstrations of violence in media. In September 2012 Federal Law "Defense children from harmful information" joined into force which in particular included restrictions for such information on TV. Now all the materials should be marked according to the age of the audience. In November 2012 so called black list of sites appeared – with the information prohibited in Russia (about drugs, children pornography, suicides). They can be closed in pretrial order. But worship of violence can be not necessarily connected with criminal topics and persons. Aggression can penetrate all the elements of modern TV content being hidden under the mask of its bright and stylish pictures and being justified by some good purposes.

This is really important as people evaluate TV programs on emotional level; surveys reveal subconscious comprehension of the TV information. They blame and reject "negative" for the insuperable problems images, generated felling of despair because nothing depends on them. Criminal issues can be considered "positive" as well as hard social reports for the point is not in the acts of violence demonstrations but whether people or the society in general are depicted as the force which is able to resist injustice. As a matter of fact the audience grasps neither genre, nor subject but inflexion of the material (Zvereva 2007).

Form of the program, composition, dramaturgy, scene transitions, foreshortening, dialogs, speech (tone, inflexion, volume level, speed) can contain aggression.

Producers obviously do not always realize the aggressive meanings of the TV images. Such examples we can watch in social advertising. The idea of slogan "Only a Man can do this" addressed to the potential blood-donors was interpreted in visual image of the game "who is extra person here?" where number of participants always one more than chairs and everybody tries to take the place being aware that the loser in this competition has to go away because there is no donor's blood for him. Trying to save themselves they kill their competitors.

Aggressive character is no more negative for TV show now, though the society does not approve aggression as a model of behavior but as tactics and strategy of TV drama action it is accessible and is regarded and justified from the point of the results.

Frightened information is often used as in instrument for the positive purposes. That is the practices of shock advertising which focuses on the problem but not on the solving, it applies to emotions and topics of death, illness, and murders are hyperbolized (Dykin 2009).

The project "Common Cause" (Purvey Channel - First Channel, 2009) can be taken as an example. The program was a part of anti-alcoholic campaign and a series of frightened advertisements which demonstrated terrible alcohol impact on human being organism and shocking consequences of the short-term and long-term usage preceded talk-show in the studio. There are doubts about such shocking methods among specialists as they can provoke negative reactions and behavior among people who do not agree with the statements. Thus discussion showed that aggressive arguments and dictatorial behavior of the moderators made participants divide in "own – alien" parts and the program position "who is not with us is against us" did not contribute society support. For example, during the discussion of upcoming alcohol prices growth at the TV program "Open studio" ("Petersburg - Fifth Channel", 2009) there was an audience survey with the following results: the majority (67%) was sure that alcohol usage would remain on the same level, and 21% proposed that people would drink even more than before.

Health as the main value is now the permanent topic of TV programs; humanistic orientation of the items is connected with the dominant values of journalism. But propaganda of healthy way of life also is based on fears and uses images of failure, sickness and death. Many programs use competition and during the action participants seeking for help have to vote from time to time to withdraw the rivals.

According to J.Galtung, such concern is not to highlight how diseases might be overcome, except by means as violent as the disease itself (Galtung 2002).

3. TV DIALOGS: COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY AND AETHETICS OF PERFORMANCE

There is a reasonable assumption that communicative media strategies must take into account the aspects of dealing with information charged and emotionally depressed audience (Kinnik, Krugman, Cameron 1996). Dialogue can become such a strategy. Dialog strategies are natural for television communication (Adamiants 1994, Bogomolova 2008, Dzialoshinskiy 2006, Pobereznikova 2004, Muratov 2003).

Psychological researches prove that "protodialog" in TV texts as intentions oriented on the mutual understanding contributes rational and critical attitude toward the world and helps the content interaction between TV watcher and a "TV person", thus the gap between the subject and the object of communication is diminished. (Adamiants 1998). Absence of dialog brings to inadequate interpretations and stereotypical ideas about the world. At the same time people percept the world as alien, uneasy, disturbed. The decisive role is not of the formal existence of dialogue but the level of it which can not realize properly in case if communicative inventions are primitive and do not respond the audience's expectations and needs.

Social costs of such TV are inevitable, it bring to life anxiety, fears, irritation and causes disconnection in the society. Development of interactive TV often connected with the hopes of public field communication development, with social control function of TV and its self regulation, as for the audience it gives people opportunity to take part in the social processes (Pobereznikova 2004).

The development of technique greatly increases the resources of TV as an organizer of social dialog. But it changes nothing in the relations of communicator and the audience in reality; the dialogue continues to be just a form but not the principle of such relations. Democratic attitude is demonstrated on TV towards the audience opinions but actually they are ignored or substituted by more preferable.

The situation correlates with N. Luhman position that tends to treat media as a closed system, where there are no direct interactions between communicator and addressee. Luhman states that feedback in mass-media exists not for such interaction but for self-reproduction of the closed system. Phone calls, opinions of the audience are chosen by producers and editors, participants take part in castings, action is staged. Thus the system uses dialog inside itself, the dialog create dramaturgy and forms certain aesthetics of TV communication (Luhman 2005). Dialog acquires show elements and exists mostly as a part of talk-show with popular persons, "media faces", demonstrative characters; common people found themselves in a TV drama of an unknown author with anchor - mask with its strict role in the dialog.

The most important thing in such dialogs is not the information (never mind the quality) but the process based on conflict, which defines the development, the action, methods if presentation and aesthetics of the show. Conflict is the subject of the dialog, as it is rather often that the conflict situations are discussed, and it is also the form, dramaturgy bases of the dialogs. So the audience watches doubled conflict story able to create additional meanings and increase the original conflict.

While attracting society attention to the problems of violence and conflict cases media are able to intrude in the situation they are dealing with, can influence the development of the real story, change its meaning as journalists can conceal facts or exaggerate what has happened. They can help to overcome the conflict or aggravate it. (Hilgartner& Bosk 1988, Linch & Galtung 2010). The models of such an intrusion was called "war journalism" and peace journalism" to stress the effect which certain ways of presenting information can have. In particular characteristic features of "peace journalism", which does not conceal conflict but is aimed at overcoming it, are: giving voice to all parties, sides of the conflict; empathy, understanding; regarding conflict/war as problem; focus on conflict creativity; humanization of all sides; focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture). Such journalism is truth oriented and expose untruths on all sides, uncover all cover-ups, it is people oriented, focused on suffering all over; on women, aged, children; giving voice to voiceless; it is aimed at prevention of conflicts; it is solution oriented which is expressed in non-violence and creativity. As for the signs of "war journalism", or violence oriented, they are: "us-them" positions, propaganda, preferably/only "us" voices; regarding "they" as a problem; focus is on who started the conflict and who prevail in war; dehumanization of "them"; focus only on visible effects of violence (killed, wounded, material damage). "War journalism' publications expose "their' untruths help "our" cover-ups; focus on "our" sufferings and are victory oriented. In this case peace is treated as victory and ceasefire (Lynch& McGoldrick 2005). Both strategies deal with conflicts and do not ignore them having just different communicative intentions. Both of them can be supported with the corresponding way of coverage. But also presentation manner can conceal or distort the first intentions, or make them less evident.

Diversity and complexity of modern conflict interactions let suppose that role settings spectrum of mass-media can be wider. (Gavra, Savitskaya 2010). Introduced approaches can be used for the analyses of conflicts of different levels both war and national or private, domestic ones.

4. METHOD OF RESEARCH

The research is aimed at the revealing of conflicts coverage peculiarities in the most popular on Russian everyday TV talk-show "Let them talk" with Andrey Malahov. The program is the most popular one, the first in the rating line, according to Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) rating in 2012 (Russian Opinion… 2012). Issues of 2012 devoted to family, private conflicts were chosen for the total sample. Television discussions concerned private conflicts especially with children involved are of peculiar interest because they intrude in long-term relations to be continued after the show. That is why the only reason of such public intrusion can be positive results of it and overcoming of the conflict. It is

especially topical now when TV is rather active in family values promotion in accordance with the trend of state social policy. In the research we treat family conflict as spouse quarrel, as a conflict between members of the related families (wife's parents and husband's parents), as a conflict caused by the children issues (methods of upbringing, problems with adopted children, communication with the children after divorce, suicides which reveal family trouble, incest cases and etc.) There are also conflict situations in the issues devoted to celebrities, birthdays or memory of well-known persons.

Most of the stories which become the topics of TV discussion are proposed by the participants. They are looking for defense, help, support from TV and initiate public intrusion in their private life by themselves. The cause of such a situation is communicative intention declared by TV which is changing the practice of demonstration of conflicts to overcoming them; from using of actors to real persons who apply for help and who really manage to get it. One can read on the official site of "Perviy Channel on the page of "Let them Talk": "They say 'the word does not help' but our program denies this proverb. Real live people stories touch you more than pathos declarations on general topics because when we discuss individual problem of an ordinary person, ordinary family we talk about what excites all the people without exclusions" (Bliss n.d.). Natalia Nikonova producer of the program evaluates the talk-show in the following way: "Previous standards are lost or degraded and we should define afresh what is good and what is bad. The program fulfils this function and in this sense for me personally it is the main demonstration of freedom on TV" (Nikonova 2007).

During 2012 more than 40% of the issues of "Let They Talk" were devoted to family conflicts (100 issues from 241) and in at least 10% of issues conflicts were not the central topic, but were mentioned and discussed (27 issues). In 20 issued conflicts in celebrity families were talked over. Twice during the year the program returned to the stories and destinies of the heroes and demonstrated positive results of journalist's intrusion in private situations. For example after DNK test a young father recognized his son; disabled girl who searched her parents met her native elder sister; a boy beaten unmercifully by his father came out of coma and his mother was grateful for everybody who helped and supported her during the crises; former drug user, son of celebrities, returned from monastery and found his love and etc. It seems that the program chooses conflict situations and uses them to form the positive models of overcoming but the final impact is based on the certain script which is interesting and instructive to examine.

Final sample for detailed analyses is formed with 12 issues of the talk-show (1 issue a month, 50 min each), devoted to family conflicts. Structure of the issues is alike, irrespective of how many situations is regarded in it. Program can be focused on one conflict situation which is regarded in details with all the participants, witnesses and experts, but also it can contain two or three similar stories related to the same problem. In any case strategies of "war" and "peace" journalism are revealed at various stages of the show.

It is necessary to point out that the show is people oriented, issues are focused on suffering of women, aged, children, giving voice to voiceless even children who are welcome to be witnesses in the family scandals. As far as the structure and methods of material presentation are repeated from one issue to another there is evident script model included the stages of conflict expressed in strategy and aesthetics of the show.

We can see different presentation during the main action and in the final stage of the show - in the process and in the result.

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Table 1. "War journalism" and "peace journalism" in the process and finale of the talk-show "Let Them Talk"

1 stage	2 stage	3 stage	4 stage	5 stage
Exposition of the conflict (s)	Development of the conflict	Development of the conflict	Culmination of the conflict (s)	Epilogue; results
"Us-Them" positions: opposition and contrast of the sides – common offences, divided TV screen. Demonstration of victims – injuries, tears, other consequences. Dramatization: angles of shooting, close-ups, camera traffic, anxious inflation.	New participants. "Us-them" positions in mise en scene, accentuation of positions. Demonstration of "our" victims; focus on "our" sufferings. "They" as a problem; focus on "who started the conflict". Composition "negation of negation".	All the participants. "Us-them" positions in mise en scene; Composition "negation of negation". Exposition of "their' untruths from both sides; Condemnation of the participants, offences. Help "our" cover-ups.	Open conflict. Mutual offense down to force collisions. Participants talk all at once, nobody listen each other. Exposition of "their' untruths from all the sides. Victory orientation. Looking for overcoming and positive results.	Experts propose common platform for peace. Promising of help. Hopes for peace. Studio wants peace. Signs of positive results.

Discussion is based on the dramaturgy of performance but not of the real individual story of a common person and common family. We can see a starting point (introduction, intrigue), characters, cast (participants), which one by one present the audience their vision of the situation and each of them either intensify the previous one or contradict him. Each of them appears with own aggressive remarks and has own mis en scene. Thus opposite groups are visually formed, they behave aggressively, offence each other, use arguments to gain victory and conflict is increasing. People at the studio and experts also participate in the process. The action takes place according a theatre mode "here and now" and this is the bases for the evaluation of the story, details are revealed gradually, as if by chance, they are denied, changed, treated in conflict discourses and are perceived due to the cogency of the participant, his image, his behavior, emotions and etc. Conflict is reproduced in the show. Sometimes preliminary films are used to support one of the conflict sides.

We can find positive movement to conflict overcoming and signs of problems decision in the action of the show; most of the issues in 2012 tend to positive results. But in fact the words and declarations about justice, love, friendship, virtue are pronounced in such an aggressive manner that changes the real

meaning of them. As the result the program which seemed to be aimed at peace and empathy can contribute conflict and worsen the situation.

Struggle of the opposite sides – conflict - is the main driving force of the program, its stylistic, and its real message if we treat TV as a form of social knowledge (Klimov 2007). Typical for the modern community ways of behavior are represented and reproduced. Form of the performance defines the roles – hero, victim, executor, judge, candid, preacher, defender etc. Positive way out which producers of the show tend to regard as their achievement turns to be just a demand of classical "soap operas", which have cultivated the whole generations of modern TV watchers and are so popular among them.

5. RESUME

- Communicative strategies of "war journalism" and "peace journalism" are obviously occur in TV talk-show devoted to family conflicts being applied to the different stages of the program. In fact the program uses the mixture of both.
- Aesthetics of "war" is useful for the drama action in the process of the show and "peace" signs appeared in epilogue.
- Positive results of the TV intervention in the conflict stories are the way to justify aggressiveness of the action. At the same time exactly dramatic presentation of the stories makes the show one of the most popular on Russian TV (attempts to finish the program on the positive episode appeared approximately 3 years ago).

Television stylistic corresponding to the topics of "hard times" and confrontations has deep roots in the TV language now and is obviously revealed in the TV content representing various issues even those which tend to be expressed in positive and optimistic ways. Probably such audiovisual stylistics keeps in itself social conflicts which are hidden under the artificial social optimism created on TV. While applied to the topics of human values journalism finds itself on the meeting-point of contradictive social realities where ethical criteria confront and compete with effectiveness and success ones and a man appeared to be a victim of the planned dramatic action and denouement. As the result we have aesthetical arguments proposed by modern TV.

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