



Television in Eastern European Literature, Art and Media. Introduction

Телевидение в
восточноевропейских
литературе, искусстве
и медиа. Введение

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I. KNOWLEDGE, LANGUAGE, RELIGION, ECONOMY AND POWER IN TV-AGE¹

There is an obvious difference between television and the book or the radio as forms of mass media: while the latter are based on a strict separation of our senses, particularly a separation of the eye and the ear requiring the visual codification and acousmatic arrangement of living speech and the participant's capacity for abstraction and imagination, electrified TV pictures reunite language and the body in a supposedly organic, synaesthetic entity. In contrast to the book and the radio, television's technicity seems to disappear in its communication: with their eyes and ears, the recipients always experience it live – be it in public or private spaces, in nature or on the moon or even in the terrestrial TV studio where the programme is being made. Since the early days of television, this effortless immediacy has repeatedly given rise to cultural criticism emphasizing its ruinous unintellectualism or educational concerns pointing to the dangers of stultification resulting from its consumption (Adorno 2003 [1953]; Anders 1961 [1956]). It is this unprepossessing nature of the medium to which Marshall McLuhan refers when he labels television a “timid giant” (McLuhan 1964, 308). Just how “gigantic” this cultural impact of television is can be measured if we recall the mechanisms of abstraction ranging from writing to the book to the radio, mechanisms that with the spread of television from the mid-twentieth century on have lost the exclusivity they held for over two-thousand years and are increasingly proving obsolete in the media cosmos of electrified images. This history of the media of abstraction can be divided into four stages representing an increasingly accelerating development.

1 The following chapter is based on a translation of the German article „Politik telekreatischer Gefolgschaft“, published in: Anne Ganzert, Philip Hauser, Isabell Otto (eds.), 2023. Ein Kompendium zu Medien der Gefolgschaft und Prozessen des Folgens. Berlin/Boston, 145–166.

(a) First, there is the graphic visualization and dissection of acoustic language in alphabetic script around the second century B.C. that gives rise to metaphysical reflection transcending the present and the doctrine of ideas and concepts. The formation of ritual and religious communities can now become the object of philosophical and rhetorical discovery and steering.

(b) With the standardization of textual signs and the mechanization of their reproduction, the printing press in the European early modern period lays the foundations for modern scientific thought guided by analysis and formalization. For the religions based on scripture – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – typography also opens up reformatory perspectives reflecting spiritual needs by providing opportunities for individual readings, often in the vernacular.

(c) A significant revolution takes place for the culture of book in the nineteenth century with the technological use of and research on electricity (McLuhan 1997, 16–38). Hidden from direct sight but effective and observable as a mechanical, thermal or optical effect in closed circuits, electricity differs from typographical analysis in its principle of synthesis and thus inspires holistic conceptions – in the form of a universal science embracing all specialist disciplines, including poetry, or in the form of a historical fulfilment of ideal concepts (Murašov 2021, 2–3). At the same time, however, the utopian visions remain trapped in the typographic space, which as the underlying experience of the Romantic era confirms the fundamental irreconcilability between the abstract sign-world of the book with its ideas and ideals on the one hand and the real historical execution of live speech and acting on the other.

(d) The relationship between the culture of the book and electricity undergoes a fundamental transformation with the electroacoustic

technologies of secondary orality – that is, the radio, which begins its ascent as a mass medium from the 1920s and 1930s on. The radio communicates knowledge acoustically, over spatial distances and also into non-literate milieus. Previous abstract, book-based knowledge is transformed into an immediate collective listening experience. Utopian visions of socialist, liberal, conservative or national communities are performatively reinforced by radiophony (Murašov 2021, 8–12).

Against this media-historical background, it is possible to sense the profound cultural impact of television. It reinforces the departure from the semiological abstractions and formalizations of the culture of the book that began with the radio, but now synaesthetically combines language and the body, hearing and seeing with its electrified images. Language no longer aims to create mental pictures, as in the case of the book or the radio; rather, it measures its communicative plausibility in terms of visibility – in terms of the extent to which personal gesture and individual expression correspond to, support and promote the semantics of the verbal – that is, how they embody it *telegenically*.

In what follows, the way TV pictures reconfigure the history of ideas brought forth by writing, the book, electricity and the radio and thereby fundamentally reshape the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the community will be examined with respect to five effects at play in the different spheres of knowledge production and its communication.

The first concerns the theoretical concept of the “singular” (1), the second the tendency for the embodiment of language (2), the third the return of the religious (3), the fourth the turn to a (neoliberal) economy of consumerism (4) and the fifth noetic effect refers to the personalization of political power and the formation of “telecratic” followings (5).

“The logic of the singular” and Idiosyncratic Knowledge

Probably no other media event marks the turn from the history of ideas carried by the book and the radio towards a culture of performative-emotive participation as clearly as John F. Kennedy’s surprise victory over Richard Nixon in the US presidential election of 1960. While the polls predicted a clear win for Nixon, the situation flipped after the candidates presented themselves in the first television duel in media history. As several sociological and politological studies subsequently showed, it wasn’t Kennedy’s argumentation and ideas that won over the public, but the overall personal and physical, telegenic impression he made. However, the majority of those who had followed the debate on the radio voted for Nixon (McLuhan 1964, 309 and 339–340).

This example from US media and political history becomes particularly telling when viewed over 70 years later in relation to subsequent tendencies and developments. It demonstrates the immense impact of television on the communication and structure of knowledge and shows how television effects a shift from general, abstract concepts and terms towards personal speech acts and embodiments that have a persuasive influence on the audience.

This noetic shift evident in the reception and political impact of the Kennedy-Nixon TV debate corresponds precisely to the one that has dominated thinking, discourses and debates since the late 1960s and early 1970s, which, informed by criticism of classical and traditional modernity and in the name of postmodernism, herald a methodological and theoretical paradigm shift. On the cultural-sociological level, Andreas Reckwitz, in his study *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten. Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne* (2019; *The Society of Singularities. On the Structural Transformation of Modernity*) diagnoses this paradigm shift

as an epochal structural transformation: “What is increasingly expected is not the *general*, but the *particular*. It is not on the standardized and regulated that the hopes, the interest and the efforts of institutions and individuals are pinned, rather it is on the unique and the singular” (Reckwitz 2021, 7). It is a structural transformation that consists in the fact that “the social logic of the general is losing its predominance to the social *logic of the particular*. This particular, the unique, that is, that which appears non-interchangeable and incomparable, [...] [is described] by the term singularity” (Reckwitz 2021, 11).

A prime example of this paradigm shift from the general to a logic of the singular is provided by Gilles Deleuzes’ and Félix Guattaris’ conception of a vitalist (liberating) philosophy in two volumes, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. While the first volume, *Anti-Oedipus* (1983 [1972]), criticizing Freud’s concept of the sublime, calls for the transcendence of capitalist, schizoid alienation via a concept of ‘desiring-machines’, the second volume, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987 [1980]) examines the methodological shape taken by such a new philosophy of liberated and unrestrained ‘desiring-machines’. These machines may no longer consist of hierarchical architectures of general categories and concepts representing the world of things and thought as a result of mechanisms of abstraction, sublimation and formalization. Rather, the overriding principle is that of the web-like, intertwined work Deleuze and Guattaris call the rhizome, consisting of nodes of concentrated semantic connections. This presents performative textual events that singularly generate their ‘semantic value’ from their verbal environments. They are not the results of semiological abstraction; rather, they each appear as particular event-like effects of various emotive-physical, mental, disciplinary-discursive, linguistic moments and resist being merged into systemic, recursive entities. The “radical-system, or fascicular

root” produce a new type of book “to which our modernity pays willing allegiance. This time, the principal root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed; an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development. This time, natural reality is what aborts the principal root, but the root’s unity subsists, as past or yet to come, as possible” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 1). Deleuze and Guattari term such a system a “rhizome”, and continue: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. [...] A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7) In rhizome, there is “no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. [...] A multiplicity has neither subject nor object” (Deleuze und Guattari 1987, 8). Due to this network structure, a rhizome “may be broken, shattered at a given spot” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 9) and “is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12).

The cited passages show how Deleuze and Guattari undo the hierarchy of the traditional book-based conceptual architecture in favour of a textual mesh consisting of singular verbal entities. The logic of the singular leads from the level of argumentation to the sphere of verbal figurativeness in which abstract facts are embodied or reified, often in neologistic constructs such as the ‘desiring machine’, the ‘rhizome’ or ‘nomadic thought’. Via its linguistic form, theory becomes an event. Here it becomes clear how the singular is proven vis-à-vis the general

via a performative act of linguistic innovation and creativity, in analogy to the “creativity dispositive” that for Reckwitz characterizes the postmodern “society of singularities” (Reckwitz 2019, 314).

Seen from a media-historical perspective, it is obvious that the transformation of discourses, theories and ways of thinking heralded as postmodern are by no means solely a phenomenon of the Western European traditions of thought and theory, but rather apply to all cultures that fall under the spell of the mass medium of television.

Indeed, this postmodern transformation can quite clearly be observed as the erosion of utopian-socialist ideas, ideals and ideologies in Eastern European societies (Murašov 2016, 291-293) The utopian promises of socialism initially developed ‘scientifically’ in the book culture of the classics by Marx, Engels and Lenin and subsequently disseminated via mass communication, reinforced as mental images by radiophony, lose their persuasiveness when under the conditions of the electrified TV pictures linguistic meaning is constantly put to the test by the physical, personal appearance of the speakers and by the real here and now of the action on the television screen. Such a failure of the Soviet, socialist-utopian ideology in the medium of television is illustrated in ironic fashion by the painting *Televide-nie* (1982-1985; Television) by the Soviet painter Erik Bulatov, which shows a room with a tired, corpulent female figure in the foreground who can no longer be mobilized by the reports of socialist successes announced by a puny newsreader in the Soviet bulletin *Vremja* (Time) (Fig. 1).

This dismantling of general and abstract concepts as the rise of television privileges the singular, the personal and the authentic is also expressed in the famous pronouncement by Czechoslovak president Alexander Dubček in 1968 when he called for the Eastern European

socialist systems to take on a “human face” and adapt to their respective national conditions.

Such a performative synthesis of theory and concrete, living, authentic practice is also the aim of the Yugoslav Praxis School with its programmatic orientation around the early writings of Karl Marx. With its internationally received journal *Praxis*, published between 1965 and 1973, and its annual summer schools on the Croatian island of Korčula, its influence extended far beyond the Yugoslav context, to various European and even American student and protest movements. The story of the Praxis School came to an end in 1975. Accused by the authorities of dissidence, its philosophers were expelled from the University of Belgrade and the journal and the summer schools were banned (Murašov 2008).

Ultimately, in Soviet culture too the erosion of the political idea of communism can be observed in the figure of Leonid Brežnev and the problems of communicating this type of leader, and especially the aging and infirm general secretary, in the mass media via television pictures. As Aleksandr Sokurov demonstrates in his critical film essay *Sovetskaja elegija* (Soviet Elegy, 1991), it was this very TV image of the personal and authentic that secured political support for Mikhail Gorbachev (Fig. 2).

With Gorbachev, we see the appearance of the leader type who not only gives a voice to a certain ideological position but also – telogenically – provides a picture, the image of a universally human and moral reliability. The political is freed from the text-based and radiophone imaginary. It now only appears in virtual form, transcendently, as it were, in TV pictures portraying the singular and authentic-personal.



← **FIG. 1**
Erik Bulatov, *Televidenie*
(Television, 1982–1985),
244 cm × 292 cm, oil on
canvas. In: Bulatov, 83)



← **FIG. 2**
Still from Aleksandr
Sokurov, *Sovetskaja
elegija* (1991; *Soviet
Elegy*), 00:25:00

Language and Embodiment

The transition from the persuasiveness of the general to the singular promoted by TV pictures is accompanied by a second noetic effect that directly concerns language itself. In contrast to the radio, and especially to text and the book, by reconnecting language to the visible physical performance, television pictures sensitize their audience to individual ways of speaking, dialects and regional idioms (Biere and Hoberg 1996). Drawing on Saussure, one might say that the pragmatic attitude to language shifts from *langue* to *parole* (Saussure 2013 [1916], 187 and 223). The spread of television gives rise to an extensive retreat from refined and written language and an awareness of grammar. This is exemplified by the experiments with and the reforms to primary school acquisition of writing skills in Western European society since the 1960s, in which attempts have been made to teach writing (and orthography) not as a semiological system, as was previously the case, but as a spontaneous form of expression of verbal language. Similarly, in foreign language teaching too the pedagogic relevance of grammar is reduced in favour of practising speaking situations. Significant aspects in this regard are also the boom of orality in the literatures of the post-war period. Firstly, a trend towards regional idioms and dialect can be observed. Secondly, there are postmodern poetics, which – unlike phonetic poetry or the semantic streams of consciousness of early modernism – now strive to stake a claim for orality as a principle in and against the written form. Such efforts include the spoken word performances of the American Beatniks such as William S. Burroughs or Jack Kerouac, which McLuhan directly links to television:

[...] TV, with its deep-participation mode, caused young poets suddenly to present their poems in cafés, in public parks, anywhere. After TV, they

suddenly felt the need for personal contact with their public.

(McLuhan 1964, 53)

The prose of the German author Arno Schmidt also stands in this tradition, with its peculiar orthography and punctuation conveying spontaneous speech driven by the subconscious, as does the Soviet Russian conceptualist writer Vladimir Sorokin's drastic language of desublimation.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan considers the example of England in describing how television promotes the retreat of standard language oriented around the written word in favour of oral idioms:

One of the most extraordinary developments since TV in England has been the upsurge of regional dialects. [...] Their sudden prominence in England in areas in which previously one had heard only standard English is one of the most significant cultural events of our time. Even in the classrooms of Oxford and Cambridge, the local dialects are heard again. The undergraduates of those universities no longer strive to achieve a uniform speech. Dialectal speech since TV has been found to provide a social bond in depth, not possible with the artificial 'standard English' that began only a century ago. (McLuhan 1964, 310)

In England, Bavaria or Switzerland, due to the high level of institutionalization and indeed the mental internalization of written-language traditions, the rise in status of regional idioms did not have any consequences for the political structures, or if it did, they were only slight. The situation was quite different in the former Yugoslavia, where the increased sensibility for regional languages due to television developed the impetus to fundamentally question the political structure of federalism.

The example of Yugoslavia is interesting in that the idea of Yugoslav – that is, South Slavic – statehood is historically a philological, text-and book-based project: in 1850, leading Serb and Croat writers and philologists, under the chairmanship of the Vienna-based Slavic scholar Franc Miklošič, gathered to unite the various Croat and Serb dialects in a common written and literary language in what became known as the Vienna Literary Agreement. The crux of the Agreement was not its concrete, pragmatic linguistic feasibility; rather, it was that on the basis of philosophical analyses of grammatical and phonological equivalent structures within the group of South Slavic languages, the vision of a South Slavic state was combined with the concept of an agreement and thereby took up the modern idea of statehood reflected in juridical categories since Thomas Hobbes. Despite all historical, political and ideological transformations, this grammatically-based and contractual principle based on written language formed the point of departure for the idea of Yugoslav statehood. The principle of a written language and the intrinsic juridical element served as the foundation of the first Yugoslav state in 1918 and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, but also accompanied the formation of socialist Yugoslavia in 1943 before being reinforced by the Novi Sad Agreement of 1954, the last time the written-language norms were formulated for the Yugoslav state (Murašov 2012, 228).

What is remarkable about the history of the linguistic debates in the former Yugoslavia is that the end of the Yugoslav Literary Agreement coincides precisely with the rise of television as a mass medium in the second half of the 1950s. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the expansion of the TV medium saw its first peak. From 1963 to 1971, the number of registered TV sets increased by some 1,000 % to approximately two million (Murašov 2012, 228).

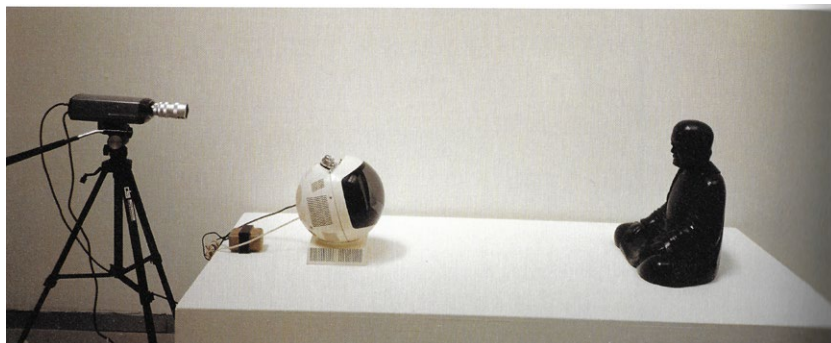
An example of how this rediscovery of regional idioms goes hand in hand with the rejection of universal political concepts and a change in policy is the 1969 book *Velike ideje i mali narodi* (Great Ideas and Small Nations) by Franjo Tuđman, who later became the first president of Croatia. A highly regarded work that even received academic awards, it collates an abundance of historical material from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to concoct a historical narrative according to which all big ideas – that is, nationalisms, Pan Slavism, European liberalism, capitalism, and even socialism – are universal concepts serving to establish abstract, inhumane power structures. The smaller and more singular the nation, the more obvious the violence of the universal. In Tuđman’s account, the civilitory success story of big ideas proves to be a narrative of the suffering of small peoples. Central to Tuđman’s version of history is the notion that talk of the singular ‘small nation’ – the Croats or other European minority language groups – functions as a counterpoint to the big, abstract ideas, thereby invoking the essential experience of a community that can be grasped only through language and not on a conceptual, rational level. Tuđman’s extensive historical narrative of the violence of the universal is intensified insofar as the semantics of the term ‘small nation’ as a sphere of the non-conceptual and the immediate is affectively charged in increasingly expansive narrative loops. It is this affective use of the word ‘small nation’ with which the text calls for an act of liberation, breaking the shackles of foreign abstractions in order to enter the history books. With its affective character, Tuđman’s historical study models as a speech act and linguistic deed the threshold to the great identity-securing act of liberation performed by the speech community of Croat dialects (Murašov 2012, 229).

Desecularization and the Return of Religion

A third noetic effect of television as a mass medium consists in the return of the religious, or to put it more precisely, the desecularization of political and social discourses in particular. If we draw on Aleida Assmann's formulation of writing and the book as the media of "ex-carnation" (1993, 135), then in the electrified TV pictures reconnecting the word to physical performance, we can see the opposite: the word's incarnation, its becoming flesh. Insofar as these incarnation events develop charismatic intensity and promote emotional, affective agreement, individual experience is moved into a horizon that cannot be grasped conceptually but can be experienced transcendently. Whereas around the radio, a community comes together spellbound by an ideological-utopian but inner-worldly idea (Murašov 2021, 217–224), television with its live and incarnation events produces an affective community. Each live event contributes both to the affective cathexis and intensification and to the transcendental rapture of collective agreement. In the TV culture, religion thus returns, not in the form of scripture-based traditions and hermeneutic concepts of faith, but in the form of attitudes produced by telemedia events or charismatic actors and fed by different confessional or protoreligious sets of motifs. The return of the religious in its different guises, including the 'spiritual' and 'fundamentalist' variants, has often been the subject of scholarship, but it has only been tentatively linked to television (Reckwitz 2021, 409–413).

This mediological conditionality has frequently been portrayed in the visual arts – perhaps most prominently in Nam June Paik's 1974 video installation *TV Buddha*. (Fig. 3)

Paik's video installation combines the religious Zen Buddhism and the technological TV medium in two aspects. The first aspect concerns



← **FIG. 3**
 Nam June Paik, *TV
 Buddha (*1974, in: TV-
 Kultur, 286).

embodiment: just as Buddha as the founder of the religion is the incarnation of the theory of (Zen) Buddhism, television too – as outlined above – represents a medium of embodiment connecting verbal meaning to physical manifestations, wherein it gauges their authenticity. Here, the Buddha figure corresponds to television’s media *Eigensinn* much more closely than would be the case if it were Jesus as the Christian or Mohammed as the Islamic embodiment of the divine on earth, both of them functioning as mediators of a numinous, transcendental authority. In contrast, Buddha is content with himself, as is the TV picture that stimulates the present in real time. The second aspect is connected to this temporal structure. Unlike the sharp division of the human senses, particularly that of the eyes and ears in writing, radio or film, the TV picture predisposes the viewer to synaesthetically active, holistic perception bound up in the here and now. In this context, McLuhan speaks of a medium of constant “nowness” (McLuhan 1964, 335). This very immersion in the moment is also a central element of Zen Buddhism, encountered namely in meditation, but also in Zen-inspired everyday practice, although conscious asceticism is about eliminating the flood of ideas and thoughts via an experience

of emptiness and nothingness. Here too, one could see a similarity to the TV medium, which also strives to dissolve conceptual and rational, abstract concepts and ideas in a logic of the singular – albeit with the significant difference that television forms affective communities, whereas Zen Buddhism aims to cleanse its adherents of affects. That Paik’s Buddha refuses to be drawn out of his meditative calm by the telematic affective communication ultimately represents a media-critical aperçu of the aesthetic exploration of religion and television undertaken by the South Korean-American artist.

Television as an apparatus of transubstantiation, as a machine that breaks ‘our daily bread’, transforming into a living, corporeal message and thereby creating an apostolic following, is the subject of Daniel Crook’s seven-minute art film *Food for Thought* (1994). Consisting of photos of paintings of saints and Christ and industrial and advertising drawings, arranged in animations, montages and collages and presented almost entirely in black and white, the film’s eleven sections dismantle television as a Christological transubstantiation machine. During such a “(tv)dinner”, the television set provides meaning, miraculously and mass-produced as “thousands fed” by the personified figure of Christ made flesh, which itself grotesquely vanishes in the TV picture’s pixel and grid structure (Figures 4, 5).

This TV semiotic feeding via the body of Christ dismembered into the breadcrumbs of TV pixels finally becomes a “speak in (...)” Pentecostal event, a spiritual agreement beyond all language in order to simultaneously produce a “communion”, a bodily-emotive common/communal knowledge in which all disciplinary and discursive categories are connected and benefit from one another. With this transubstantiation of our daily bread via the TV set with its electrified grid structure into mass knowledge of salvation comes the sanctification

and “ascension” when, finally, the toasted slices of bread pop out of the toaster and take on the form of “pilgr(image)” disciples before the TV set (Figs. 6–9).

The desecularization and the return of the religious ushered in by television culture can be observed in the discourse and practice of the political since the 1960s and 1970s, in various constellations ranging from militant religious fundamentalism to the increasingly religious legitimation and culturalization of the political in states constituted as secular. Examples would be Islamic Turkey, Orthodox Russia or the evangelical USA, but ultimately this development also includes a politics of culture and symbols characterized by the reactivation of the religious.

A prime example of the desecularization of the political is socialist Yugoslavia, where since the late 1960s and 1970s the new status accorded to regional, spoken dialects under the influence of television as a mass medium in all the republics goes hand in hand with the desecularization of the political. The political consequences of this development were greatest in Bosnia with its Muslim character (Murašov 2012, 230). The milieu of the emergent Young Muslims (*Mladi Muslimani*) in the 1960s gave rise to the *Islamic Declaration* (*Izlamska deklaracija*), a treatise largely authored by Alija Izetbegović, who would later become the first president of post-socialist Bosnia-Herzegovina. Initially circulated as a typescript, after its print publication in 1970 it enjoyed an international reception while remaining banned in socialist Yugoslavia. Like the Croat Tuđman, Izetbegović initially opposed the primacy of ‘great ideas’ and abstract concepts, an argument culminating in the assertion: “A multiplicity of laws and a complex legislature is usually a sure sign that that something is rotten in a society” (Izetbegović 1990 [1970], 28).

FIG. 4 →
Still from Daniel
Crooks' Food for
Thought (1994):
“(tv)dinner”,
“thousands fed”.



FIG. 5 →
Still from Daniel
Crooks' Food for
Thought (1994):
“(tv)dinner”,
“thousands fed”.





← **FIG. 6**
Still from Daniel Crooks' *Food for Thought* (1994): "speak in (...)", "communion", "ascension", "pilgr(image)".



← **FIG. 7**
Still from Daniel Crooks' *Food for Thought* (1994): "speak in (...)", "communion", "ascension", "pilgr(image)".

FIG. 8 →
Still from Daniel Crooks' Food for Thought (1994): "speak in (...)", "communion", "ascension", "pilgr(image)".



FIG. 9 →
Still from Daniel Crooks' Food for Thought (1994): "speak in (...)", "communion", "ascension", "pilgr(image)".



However, whereas Tuđman bases the political on the singularity of the (Croat) spoken idiom, for Izetbegović it is the religious spiritual experience that underlies the sense of political community. “In contrast to a society, as an abstract community with external relationships among its members, the Jama’a is an internal, tangible community, founded on spiritual membership, where contact between people is maintained by direct, personal acquaintance.” (Izetbegović 1990, 33)

The disqualification of universal, conceptual ideas as self-alienation and internally experienced membership as the wellspring of the political indicate that Izetbegović’s understanding of the political does not follow the abstract logic of book-based culture or the ideological poetics of the radio but is rather influenced by electrified TV pictures and their mechanisms of incarnation forming communities of conviction. As in Daniel Crook’s animation *Food for Thought*, it is a case of blending a sense of religious community and TV technicity, that is, the resolution of the very conflict that – for Izetbegović in the *Islamic Declaration* – is the cause of confusion and division among Bosnian Muslims in secular Yugoslavia “if mosque and TV transmitter aim contradictory messages at the people” (Izetbegović 1990, 43).

The Neoliberal Economy of Consumerism

Writing and the book display contradictory dynamics: to the extent that they promote the discovery, exploration and intensification of individual needs, wishes and drives, enabling us to experience them emotionally and rationally, satisfaction can be calculated in the realm of the fictional, but it always remains trapped within the cosmos of signs and unfulfilled in real life. Even when it is a matter of practical needs, print media and the radio reinforce the difference between current necessity and real fulfilment as a categorical distinction. This

economy of drives and deferment has been described from various disciplinary perspectives. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the sublimation of drives via intellectual achievements in art and science is based on it. In philosophy, it is reflected in Jacques Derrida's concept of "différance" (Derrida 1974, 44), according to which all production of sense and meaning by writing and the book remain unfinished, although this deferment itself is the prerequisite for all semiosis. It is this circular, triadic structure of production, abstraction and consumption that Max Weber also discovers in his examination of capitalism and the Protestant ethic, which consists in a "release of acquisitive activity". is combined with its opposite, the "limitation of consumption"; the result is the "accumulation of capital by ascetic compulsion to save" (Weber 2005 [1930], 116). That this specific type of capitalism is largely linked to the medium of the book is demonstrated by the cultural-historical thrust of Weber's study. Both developments Weber juxtaposes are a consequence of the printing revolution (Eisenstein 1983). Thus the printing press represents the basis for an individualization of Bible reading and decouples faith from ritual and institutionally regulated forms of experience. This allows the "rationalization of conduct within this world, but for the sake of the world beyond" (Weber 2005, 100) as a form of "inner-worldly asceticism" (Weber 2005, 53 and *passim*) in its manifold variants, from Calvinism to the Lutherans to American Protestant sects. Similarly, it is also typography that performs a "symbolic generalisation" ("symbolische Generalisierung", Luhmann 1997, 321–322) which now, unlike the various capitalist practices of earlier periods and in different parts of the world (Weber 1988 [1920], xxxiii), produces the 'spirit of capitalism' as an economic rationality permeating all areas of life and knowledge.

Just as television, since the 1960s and 70s, has encouraged (theoretical) discourses to sideline the general in favour of the singular, has increased sensitivity to regional idioms over the grammaticality of language and has prompted a return of the religious, it has also subverted and transformed the ascetic-Protestant type of capitalist business based on the culture of the book. This too is due to the structure of the electrified TV pictures, which in contrast to the medium of the book does not represent verbal meaning abstractly by encoding it in graphic signs. Rather, here the verbal meaning seems to be performatively fulfilled in real life in the synaesthetic reintegration of sound and picture. Television pictures produce and communicate, with their constant “nowness”, dispositions of fulfilment in the here and now. TV pictures combine the production of desire (for meaning) and satisfaction. The mechanisms of abstraction which in the culture of the book and the radio separate want, need and desire from fulfilment, satisfaction and consumption and ensure antithetical dynamics are switched off. In TV pictures, it is not production that dominates, but the principle of consumption.

It is at this connection between television and consumerism that the early culture-critical theories of television take aim. A prime example is Günther Anders’ “philosophical observations on radio and television” entitled “The World as Phantom and as Matrix” (1956; “Die Welt als Phantom und Matrise”). Firstly, the news presented on the television screen is described as a “phantom” in which the difference between reality and representation appears to be removed, and, secondly, the “phantom” is delivered to the homes of the “consumers” as “goods”. The former sequence of need and consumption is reversed. “Not what one needs, one finally gets, but what one has, one finally needs.” („Nicht was man benötigt, hat man schließlich, sondern was man hat, das benötigt

man schließlich.“ Anders 1961 [1956], 176) Need and consumption are short-circuited: “need follows consumption immediately. And in some sense, ‘addiction’ is the pattern of the contemporary need; that means, that needs owe their being and shape to the factual existence of certain goods.“ („das Bedürfnis folgt dem Konsum auf dem Fuße. Und in gewissem Sinn ist ‚Sucht‘ das Modell des heutigen Bedürfnisses; womit gesagt ist, dass die Bedürfnisse ihr Da- und So-sein der faktischen Existenz bestimmter Waren verdanken.“ (Anders 1961, 176)

Anders’ philosophical critique of the electrified mass media and the television in particular culminate in a polemical dismantling of the “Economic ontology” of consumerism. In contrast to these reflections on the result and effect of television, the economic theory of the 1950s and 1960s diagnosed a paradigm shift and announced a guideline for future economic activity: consumption as the principle of free, self-regulating markets. A decisive figure behind this departure from the abstraction-based capitalist or even socialist economy of ascetic or utopian deferment was the US economist Milton Friedman. In his microeconomic study *Theory of the Consumption Function* (1957), he establishes the central significance of consumption for the development of stable economic structures. In *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), the principle of demand and consumption is macroeconomically universalized in order to argue – in polemical contrast to socialism – that democracy and the personal liberty of the individual can only be guaranteed if the economic rationality of the free, consumerist market is effective in all relevant functional areas of society, including education, healthcare and public transport. Even if the demand for and sale and consumption for goods have been an integral component of macro- and economic theoretical models since the automation of industrial (mass) production of ‘Fordism’ at the latest, it is not until the rise of television

as a mass medium that consumption becomes a central, all-pervading economic and cultural principle.

The media-historical connection between economic consumerism and television is evident in works of art and literature of socialist Eastern Europe – for instance, Il’ja Kabakov’s painting *Salon in a Luxury Apartment in Hotel Pearl in Soči* (1981), which directly links late Soviet tourism as a form of consumerism with television (Fig. 10).

Kabakov’s picture juxtaposes two forms of consumption, or in this case tourism. With the text comprising white typescript and the graphic scheme in the left-hand half of the picture, Soviet tourism is initially described as a collective “excursion by bus along the Black Sea coast,” praised as the “best way for visitors to recuperate on the Black Sea coast” and supplemented by verbal information about the coastal bus route and the address of the travel agency. Although the linguistic invitation is certainly suggestive in its wording, the text and the graphic scheme of the route retain the feel of abstract sketches. The picture itself deals with individual tourism and directly shows the interested consumer the object of desire – in keeping with the formal subtitle in the bottom right-hand corner: a “recreational space [*komnata otdy-cha*] of an apartment in Hotel Pearl” in Soči. In this picture, linguistic and graphic expression are fulfilled. Unlike the pedagogic, educational text of Soviet, collective leisure, the luxury room advertised presents itself to the viewer as a perspectival extension of an imaginary space that with its two large windows and the transparent, half-open curtains is flooded with light and with its pompous, red settee in the foreground conveys the impression of a peculiar emptiness the viewer is invited to fill with individual desires and hence intimate wishes.

The picture’s main focus is the television, which as a striking brown box between the light windows dominates the scene and via which the

two touristic concepts – the verbal, abstract promise of a collective trip and the concretely depicted offer of a luxury apartment – are placed in relation to one another. With the surface of the TV screen reflecting the view from the large front window, the television forms the central point of the entire composition. It functions as a metonym in two senses; it appears as the cause of the dismantling of the verbal socialist promise of happiness and as part of the depicted transcendence of the acousmatically blind linguistic text by the figural, vivid picture of a (touristic) space of individual wish production and fulfilment.

Such a transition from the utopian planned economy based on deferment to a consumerist economy due to the rise of television is also the subject of Arkadij and Boris Strugackij's novel *Ponedel'nik načinaetsja v subbotu*, (1965; *Monday Begins on Saturday*), set in the “Scientific Research Institute for Magic and Sorcery” where researchers investigate the technological feasibility of utopian visions. Consumerism plays a key role here, initially verbalized by a magic pike that fulfils wishes. Derived from Russian fairytales and kept in the institute's archive, the pike laments the increasing individualization and excessiveness it encounters in what people wish for – above all their brazen desire for television sets. The topic of consumerism continues with the figure of Professor Ambrosij Ambruazovič Vybegallo and his project concerning the comprehensive production and satisfaction of material needs in the form of a “universal consumer”. Vybegallo explains this human ideal type to the press, and to the horror of his colleagues at the institute, by declaring:

Here we have our ideal [...]. Or to be more precise, the model of the ideal of all of us. Here we have before us the universal consumer who wants everything and – ergo – can do everything. Built into him are all the

desires that there can possibly be in the world. And he can also satisfy all these desires. With the help of our science, of course. [...] The model of a universal consumer [...] wants and wants without limitation. All of us, comrades, with our self-admiration, are simply nothing compared to him. Namely, because this fellow wants such things about which we don't have the faintest idea. And he won't wait for nature to give him alms. He takes from nature everything he needs for his happiness, that is, for his satisfaction. His material powers automatically extract from nature everything he needs. The happiness of the given model will be indescribable. It will know neither thirst nor hunger, neither toothache nor personal troubles. All its needs will be satisfied the moment they arise. (Strugackij 1982, 174)

But Vybegallo's field trip to the production of an ideal "universal consumer" fails miserably. Vybegallo only creates an explosion of filth and rubbish, although that does nothing to weaken his convictions. Nor can the firm criticism voiced by his colleagues at the institute kill his enthusiasm for his project, especially as he considers the "universal consumer" to be of "international importance":

Here we have an experiment of international importance! The great mind shall emerge here, in the halls of our institute! That is a symbol, don't you see? It will be an advertisement for our entire institute! (Strugackij 1982, 189)

There are three remarkable elements to this episode. The first is that the project of a consumerist, "superegoistic" economy does not figure as a capitalist alternative to the Soviet, collectivist planned economy; rather, it is conducted by Vybegallo at the "Scientific

Research Institute for Magic and Sorcery” as the equally fairytale-like realization of utopian promises – an undertaking which in the opinion of its progenitor steadfastly implements the institute’s materialist worldview. The *second* element concerns how Vybegallo’s “universal consumer” corresponds with the episode of the magic pike who grants wishes, whose lament about current people’s self-indulgence and greed centres on the motif of the television. As in Kabakov’s painting *Salon in a Luxury Apartment in Hotel Pearl in Soči*, in the Strugackijs’ novel the consumerist economy is linked to the mass media of television.

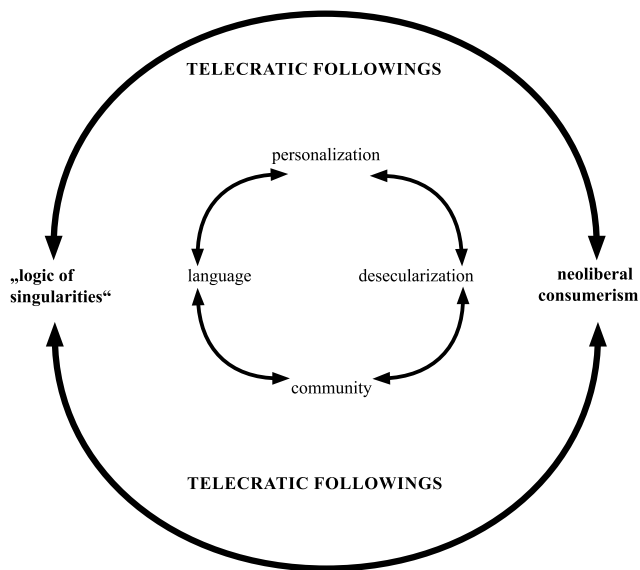
The (implied) reference to television gives rise to the third element: Vybegallo’s proclaimed “internationality” of the “universal consumer”. Under the specific technological conditions of television, the consumerist economy is set in motion irrespective of the national, historical and cultural circumstances. The economy of consumerism proves to be an international economic epiphenomenon of television’s advance as a mass medium, an epiphenomenon embracing both socialist and capitalist (book-based) economic cultures.

The Personalization of Power and Telecratic Followings

In the interplay between the noetic effects TV pictures in the fields of knowledge, language, religion and the economy, the concept of the political undergoes a fundamental transformation. Well-argued and reflected programmes for political action, their legitimation and their realization in formal, institutional and juridical procedures become less relevant for the formation of structures. The resources for political decision-making processes shift towards the field of emotive, mass-communication-driven mobilization of idiosyncratic dispositions and attitudes which themselves are formed out of rejection of and resentment towards general and abstract concepts.



← **FIG. 10**
Il'ja Kabakov, *Salon in a Luxury Apartment in Hotel Pearl in Soçi (1981)*



← **FIG. 11**
The structure of telecratic followings.

This transformation of the political that goes hand in hand with the rise of television as a mass medium has been described from the perspective of various disciplines, each placing different emphasis on the noetic effects of TV pictures that we have analysed. A prominent example is Jürgen Habermas, who in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991 [1962]) observes a tendency for depoliticization under the conditions of the post-modern, economic culture industry. A similar argument is put forward by Günther Anders when he speaks of a „Schlaraffenland“ to which the TV views are transported, with the effect that political stances are suppressed by passive consumption (Anders 1961, 172). Collin Crouch, in his study *Post-Democracy* (2008 [2005]), analyses a general loss of relevance of discourses concerning political programmes and a movement away from competence-led acting on the part of public institutions towards maximizing economic efficiency (Crouch 2015). Habermas' and Anders' observations and Crouch's politological analyses are persuasively confirmed by Thomas Piketty's study *Capital et Idéologie* (2020 [2019]) on the basis of data on electoral behaviour in European, Asian and American societies. Piketty shows how with the rise of economic neoliberalism since the 1960s discourses, visions and utopian concepts of dealing with societal inequalities have disappeared from political programmes (particularly those of the social democrat, left-wing parties and movements) and have lost their significance for the population's voting behaviour. In their stead, “social nationalist” positions determined by religious and/or linguistic-ethnic belonging have taken on greater relevance for political thought and actions (Piketty 2020 [2019], 647). It is precisely such a shift from the political to a mental and psychological sphere of attitude as ‘psychopolitics’ that Bernard Stiegler identifies in ‘telecraty’ – in a power structure that is formed and reinforced under the conditions of mass television (Stiegler 2006).

The different observations on the post-modern transformation of the political can be linked to the noetic effects of TV pictures – singularization, the embodiment of language, resecularization and neoliberal consumerism – in a structure encompassing two function cycles. Here it becomes apparent that the reciprocal reinforcement between economic reproduction and the formation of communities of conviction based on resentment described by Joseph Vogl in *Kapital und Ressentiment. Eine kurze Theorie der Gegenwart* (2021; *Capital and Resentment. A Short Theory of the Present*) in the context of internet and platform capitalism was already beginning to emerge under the conditions of television.

In an initial function cycle, it is the switch from knowledge to the singular and idiosyncratic on the one hand and on the other hand the neoliberal, consumerist economy of the production and fulfilment of needs that, in TV pictures, reciprocally feed each other's tendencies towards the concrete in the here and now and the rejection of abstraction and ascetic or sublimating deferment. Both sides display a focus on the personal: in the case of the latter, the emphasis is on a singular, idiosyncratic knowledge and opinion that barely entertains ideas, ideals and abstractions, and in the case of the former, it is on subjects that experience themselves and their particular needs and satisfaction in economic terms. This double-sided mechanism rooted in both economics and a poetics of knowledge, and set in motion by the TV pictures, also determines how television functions as an institution in the context of societal communication as a whole. On the one hand, as a mass medium, television circulates singular knowledge and opinions, and on the other hand, it functions as an economic actor the success of which can be measured by viewing figures. Particularly in this overall societal context, it becomes clear how knowledge structure and the economy are intertwined. The increasingly refined methods allowing nuanced

evaluation of audience response enable the identification of demand for broadcasting formats, content and motifs in order to optimize television's economic performance. Television reproduces itself in economically successful fashion by establishing and asserting itself as a resonance machine for an eroded form of knowledge of the singular and the idiosyncratic – that is, a form of knowledge that has regressed into opinions.

If the first function cycle displays a centrifugal and dispersive dynamic via an economically calculated singularization of knowledge and reproduction of opinions, then in a second function cycle it centripetally feeds back into two entities of the universal. This cycle is a result of the interplay between the two noetic effects of the embodiment of languages and desecularization produced by the TV pictures, and enriches the circulating idiosyncratic knowledge and opinions reproduced by the telemedia with historical and cultural residues. Additionally, these residues are themselves mobilized in two directions: on the one hand towards a linguistic and/or protoreligious experience of community and on the other hand towards a personification of the communal in charismatic actors. This constellation forms the energetic centre out of which the political is produced under the conditions of telecraty – as a specific type of community that can be described by the term “following”.

Similar to the pre-modern following with a free individual's personal bond and loyalty to a leader figure, the telecratic community is not constituted via a general idea or programme. Rather, it is formed via singular, idiosyncratic knowledge, attitudes and opinions that release linguistic and/or protoreligious forces of cohesion via mass-media-economic mobilization, forces which are then bound by personification and leadership. This is how political agency is constituted. The binding

strength of this telecratic following, both internally and to the leader figure, results from the very dispositions – produced by the TV pictures – of knowledge of the singular, the attitudes and the opinions that, insisting on the concrete of the here and now, are constituted by the rejection of the general, the abstract and the formal. Accordingly, politics built on telecratic followings is underpinned and sustained precisely by “resentment” towards formal, institutional and juridical procedures (Vogl 2021, 166). And to the extent that this politics relies on the mobilization of singular dispositions of knowledge and opinions, it does not require any rationally or empirically established truths; rather, it operates with idiosyncratic pictures of reality that, as affective stimuli, claim to be valid and to reflect reality. The “fake news” (Vogl 2021, 177) circulated in this fashion is by no means a threat to the cohesion of telecratic followings. On the contrary, via its very aberration of reinforcing socio- and psychomotoric cohesion, it serves as a resource for agency and the reproduction of political power.

The telecratic production of the political in the form of followings formed in the tension between, on the one hand, the production of knowledge and the economy and, on the other hand, language and religion can be illustrated by the following schema (Fig. 11).

A recent American example of followings generated in and via TV pictures and forming the foundation of political agency and claims to power is Donald Trump’s presidential election campaign of 2016 and his subsequent, notorious undermining of formal institutions and procedures. Trump’s anti-institutionalism ultimately culminated in his refusal to accept his defeat in the 2021 elections, which he claimed were ‘fraud’ and ‘fake’, which then moved him to incite his supporters to violently storm the Capitol. At the same time, Trump’s political career is also an example of how the psychopolitical possibilities and

techniques of telecraty have been considerably advanced by online digital communication.

Similarly to the above-mentioned mobilization of Croatian nationalist or Bosnian Islamic followings as resources for Franjo Tuđman's or Alja Izetbegović's politics, during the early years of Vladimir Putin's rule politically effective telecratic followings with both linguistic and religious dispositions became established. At the same time, the post-Soviet example clearly demonstrates how in the formation of such followings, neoliberal economics and the reproduction of totalitarian violence intertwine, each promoting the other.

Putin's first election victory was itself the result of an artful TV image campaign that used highly effective mass communication to depict Putin as the authentic embodiment of a man of action concerned with the welfare of the citizens. Installed as an interim president at the turn of 2000 by the outgoing Boris Jelcyn, Putin expressly did without any kind of election campaign and the TV debates so symptomatic of the liberal post-Soviet 1990s. Instead, he presented himself on all television channels as an agile doer omnipresent throughout the country and concerned with everything related to the people at large. This culminated in a media coup on 26 March 2000, on the eve of the presidential elections, when he presented himself as a pecuniary saviour by signing a decree raising wages by 20 per cent for teachers, doctors and other public sector workers, which ultimately secured him 52.9 per cent of the vote in the first ballot (Belton 2020 [2022], 211). Four days after Putin took office, a system of power began to be developed around him, the so-called 'power vertical'; the market-leading media companies were accused of tax evasion and enriching themselves with public funds. These accusations, effective publicity but never proven in a court of law, forced the sale of the media companies to actors from within the presidential

administration's closest informal circle. Vladimir Gusinskij, the owner of the Media Most group, which ran the popular, critical NTV network, was forced to sell his company to the state gas monopoly Gazprom in exchange for around 300 million dollars and 473 million dollars in debt relief. Likewise, Boris Berezovskij had to transfer his shares in the ORT television network to Roman Abramovič, a close ally of Putin's (Belton 2020 [2022], 244 and 251). This transfer of property rights was accompanied by the restructuring of the networks' staff and broadcasting formats, and a three-pronged orientation of the mass media content.

Firstly, Putin was consistently portrayed on television as a man of action and care performing adeptly on both the national and international political stages, acting empathetically in intimate circles of friends, playing sports or in the Siberian wilderness and showing himself to be a religious man in his encounters with the clergy and those of the Russian Orthodox faith.

Secondly, it was these religious *Sujets* and motifs increasingly defined by the TV broadcasts and pictures that reinforced a mobilization of a sense of community as a following inspired by Russian Orthodoxy. The mystical identification of the state and Church peculiar to Russian Orthodox theology and the associated mystical sanctioning of profane this-worldliness now functioned as the stimulus and motivation for a decisive battle against all discursive-critical, occasionally demonic questioning of the political and societal status quo by artists and intellectuals (Murašov 2016, 207–304). Corresponding broadcasts, including the religious advice series by the prominent film director Nikita Mikhalkov, *Besogon* (Exorcism), communicated this Russian Orthodox stance via the mass media. The system thereby secured support for its persecution of critics of the regime, which set in during the 2000s and has become ever more rigorous.

Just as the return and mobilization of Russian Orthodoxy via TV pictures legitimizes the violence of the state institutions in the inner world of society, *thirdly*, the motif and topic of Russophobia communicated via TV serves to mobilize support for the actions of the state beyond its internationally recognized borders. Here we are dealing with the idea of the ‘Russian world’ (*Russkij mir*) already developed in the 1990s and reformulated in the early 2000s by the presidential administration’s Vladislav Surkov, according to which the Russo-phone community is connected to an imagined geographical space extending beyond the territory of the state (Surkov 2021). The ‘Russian(-speaking) world’ mass-communicated by television, a world that audiences can psychomentionally experience in sound and image, provides state power with the majority following that has enabled it to portray the preparations and military realization of illegal territorial claims as necessary and natural measures to secure Russian cultural and linguistic identity – in Abkhazia in 2008, Crimea and the Donbas in 2014, and finally in the war against Ukraine since 2022.

Although the change in owners of the media companies and the TV networks in 2000 was initiated by force and with the support of the domestic secret service, the FSB, their restructuring followed the principles of the market economy and financial economics. The same holds for the media companies and TV stations themselves as economic actors that remain efficient, profit-maximizing economic entities operating along the lines of financial economics while generating mass support and psychosocial followings. In this way, the presidential administration can present itself as a reliable guardian of the free market, with reference to international markets and the associated political ideas, which lent Putin credibility on his visits to the USA and Western Europe (Belton 2022 [2020] 234–235 and 343). This double

game of a free market economy and totalitarian politics of coercion supported by sociopsychological followings was also shaped by the crushing of Mikhail Khodorkovskij's raw materials and finance empire Jukos in 2003, which followed the same pattern of widespread public approval as the authorities' pursuit of Gusinskij's media company – albeit on an incomparably larger industrial and financial scale, with much harsher consequences for Khodorkovskij and his partners and with considerably more complicated financial, ownership and operational restructuring procedures. The dismantling of Jukos meant that nearly all of Russia's energy sector and raw materials production was concentrated in the hands of actors from within Putin's close circle of associates (Belton 2022, 261–296). The economic power of the newly formed group of companies boosted the interests of foreign investors involved in Russia since the 1990s, including Deutsche Bank and the Dresdner Bank, who participated in the development and reinforcement of the new, statist architecture of the Russian energy industry (Belton 2022, 353) and thereby supported and promoted the power-political and violence-oriented reproduction of the “Putin system” (Mommsen and Nußberger 2009).

It is this reciprocal intensification of the expansion of neoliberal-consumerist economic circuits and the increasing decoupling of political activity from all juridical, institutional and ethical foundations via the mass mobilization of sociopsychic followings, driven by the noetic effect of TV pictures, that have allowed the political system in Russia under Putin since the 2000s to slide into a spiral of violence towards opponents both at home and abroad. And it is this very mechanism of economics and a telecratic following that also drove German foreign policy, beginning with Frank-Walter Steinmeier from 2005 on, to increasingly pursue a politics of “change through interdependence”

and to enter into a “modernizing partnership” with the totalitarian “Putin system” (Wehner 2022).

II. TV IN AESTHETICS AND NARRATION

A far-reaching consequence of McLuhan’s renowned dictum “The medium is the message” is the heuristic re-evaluation of aesthetic artefacts (Murašov 2024). In this media-theoretical perspective, artistic creations represent a sphere preceding the concept-based discourses, a sphere in which those shocks and shifts are registered that are triggered by technological innovations in the conventionalized status quo framework of knowledge and discourses of a cultural community. In this sense, aesthetic artefacts are not only *faits sociaux* in which socioeconomic structures are replicated, but also *faits medials* (Murašov 2023, 4) dealing with material-technological as well as perceptual and sensory circumstances influencing the production and communication of knowledge before the latter is conceptualized in the specialized discourses. Writers and artists are – according to McLuhan – “experts” on the cultural “effects of technology”:

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception. (McLuhan 1964, 18)

[...]

The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah’s ark for facing the change that is at hand. [... S]o the artist

is indispensable in the shaping and analysis and understanding of the life of forms, and structures created by electric technology. (McLuhan 1964, 64f.)

To a large extent, this analytical value of the aesthetic holds for television, which by its supposed closeness to reality eludes observability and develops as a “timid giant” (McLuhan 1964, 308) – latently, but all the more powerfully – its noetic effects in the fields of theoretical and linguistic concepts, religion, economics and politics.²

This heuristic relevance of aesthetic and narrative representation for the analysis of the televisual medium’s profound impact on cultural systems is the guiding thesis underlying the selection of the essays on Russia, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Kazakhstan contained within this volume of *Slavica TerGestina*.

The essays are also informed by another conceptual constellation developed by McLuhan in *Understanding Media*: the distinction between hot and cold media, which enables an understanding of the reciprocal effects of media and their resultant cultural impact.

This thermodynamic distinction between hot and cold takes aim at the degree of differentiation and specialization inherent to media with respect to representation and communication and hence their energy and development potential (Murašov 2022). For instance, the printed word (using the phonetic alphabet) represents a hot medium in that it radically divides sight and hearing, demands of the eye a high degree of specialization and precision and releases future-looking dynamics of differentiation. In contrast, spoken language is a cold medium „of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener.“ (McLuhan 1964, 23). And it has a tendency to inhibit differentiation and distancing.

2 At the same time this profound cultural impact of television also essentially depends on the local media-technological conditions and traditions – and hence primarily on the degree of institutionalization and mental internalization of literacy (Ong 2002 [1982], 77–114). The higher the degree of textualization, the more sluggish, compact and resistant the cultures prove to be to the media self-will of the TV pictures, which with their performative “nowness” are the very opposite of the medium of distance and abstraction that is the book. And conversely, the lower the degree of internalization and institutionalization of literacy, the more receptive and open the cultures to the new, electrified media, particularly television. The latter especially applies to the Eastern European, Slavic linguistic cultures, since here the textualization of the national languages and the expansion of the printing press and the book trade came relatively late – compared to Western Europe – and were initially also substantially limited to the sacral sphere and restricted by politics (Murašov 2016, 15–20).

Taking language, writing and printing as our point of departure enables us to compare the cultural effects of the distinction hot/cold and chemotechnological and electrified media such as photography, telegraphy, the gramophone, the telephone, cinema, radio and television:

There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like the radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends once single sense in "high definition". High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, "high definition". A cartoon is "low definition", simply because very little visual information is provided. The telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. (McLuhan 1964, 22 f.)

This model of gradual tempering enables us to measure dynamics of increasing or decreasing differentiation processes or the intensification or absorption of analytical energy potentials in intermedia constellations and reciprocal representations. For instance, cold spoken language within the hot medium of the written word (in the specialist discourse of *rhetoric*) takes on an energetic potential, specifying and strengthening the ways it can be used. Conversely, a hot written text becomes tied to a given situation and hence cooled by vocal performance.

We can also identify such conflicting dynamics in representations involving television. If cold television is depicted in hot media like

film, painting, photography or literature, it loses its cold, performative nowness while its specific effects become more prominent on a higher energetic level of differentiation. And conversely, the potential for differentiation displayed by hot media, such as writing, literature, painting and film, is absorbed when they are cooled as objects of communicative participation in TV pictures.

When the volume presents the individual articles in chronological order, it is to capture three phases of the conceptualization of television in which the interplay of the different media gives rise to different-tempered modi of understanding the world and acting – modi that can be situated in a broad spectrum between cold performative involvement and hot analytical distancing. The volume's three sections are each dedicated to a theory on the conceptualization of television and the resulting cultural energetic potential.

If television became the subject of socialist film from the 1960s to the 1980s, then it was the hot, analytic-differentiating effect of cinematography that makes clear how the cold TV medium contributes to the deconstruction of the book- and word-based socialist cultures: to the extent that seeing and speaking are synaesthetically reintegrated in the TV pictures, abstract, ideological truth proves no longer aptly communicable (1). With this gesture of the authentic and the documentary, television is initially also connected to the post-socialist portrayals of the 1990s in art and photography. At the same time, in the early 2000s one could see that the cold TV medium performatively involving its recipients beyond the anti-utopian protest began to dismantle discourses of the conceptual, instead favouring affective stances and attitudes across the board. As a mass medium of affects and attitudes, television promotes authoritarian forms of power and the formation of charismatically oriented (political) followings.

It is at these telecratic hegemonial structures that the critical dismantlings in YouTube videos, film and literature of the 2010s take aim (2). Parallel to the television motifs and *sujets* in various hot aesthetic portrayals, we can observe a contrary media energy flow from the 1960s on: the poetics of performativenowness broadly communicated by TV pictures itself begins to reshape filmic and literary narration. The traditional, book- and film-based narration cools into an aesthetic of the performative, intertextual, serial and incomplete that is often labelled postmodern (Lyotard 1979). In the mass genre of TV series from the 1990s onwards, this postmodern, cool narrative style finds its way back into television as a narrative type of *Complex TV* (Mittell 2015). Here it is less about narration as “truth and invention” (Koschorke 2012) than about the sequencing and linking of performative-affective attitudes – from *laughter* to charismatic admiration. The mass television series of complex TV thus indicate a profound transformation in the narrative culture and represent a symptom of the cooling of originally hot, book-based knowledge under the conditions of television. At the same time, however, they offer a forum for the critical exposure of the structures of this cooled production and communication of knowledge by entertainingly playing with the notorious instability of affective attitudes and corresponding (political) followings (3).

The volume’s individual articles each examine different aspects of these three developmental phases.

1) In the first section, *Deconstructing Socialist Cultures*, Maria Zhukova’s article “‘Monolog raspachnutoj duši’: Fernsehen und Lyrik im sowjetischen Film” (“Monolog raspachnutoj duši”: Television and Lyrics in Soviet Film) considers popular Soviet films: *Perechodnyj vozrast* (Transitional Age, 1968, Ričard Viktorov) and *Moskva slezam ne verit* (Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears, 1979, Vladimir Menšov). Zhukova shows how

poetry plays a central role in both films while being linked to television – similar to McLuhan’s ideas in which the poetry boom from the 1950s onwards is traced back to the experience of the (re-)integration of semantics and physical expression communicated by cool TV pictures. In both Soviet films, television functions as a medium via which poetic, authentic speaking is articulated publicly and thereby counteracts the claims to validity of the official socialist-utopian ideology.

Under the title “Das Fernsehen und die Demontage des Bestarbeitermythos” (Television and the Dismantling of the Model Worker Myth), Fabian Erlenmaier examines Andrzej Wajda’s film *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977). The film depicts the failed attempt to reproduce the story of a renowned socialist hero of labour of the 1950s for the mass-media TV present of the 1970s as part of the propaganda effort. Erlenmaier makes clear how resolutely the Polish director narrates the failure of the best worker ideology as a result of the conditions of TV production and above all the documentary gesture of the mobile TV camera. Before the television camera, the compact ideological heroic narratives collapse into a multitude of personal and self-serving episodes, ultimately revealing themselves to be a falsification. The real life of the hero of labour, on the other hand, proves to be an allegorical Passion story. Moved by the sensory nature of the TV pictures, Wajda develops a multilayered filmic pictorial language that is symbolically enriched insofar as it loosens its semantic-narrative references.

In the article “The Shadows of the Real: Representations of Television in Bulgarian film, 1970–1989”, Todor Hristov uses diary entries by TV viewers to empirically demonstrate how in Bulgarian socialist society the rise of television as a mass medium from the 1960s on meant that the performative power of the official, ideological discourses declined. Hristov analyses three examples of filmic reflections of this

3 The cultural-critical orientation of Moscow conceptualism towards manuscript-based techniques is vividly illustrated by Günter Hirt's [Georg Witte] and Sascha Wonder's [Sabine Hänsgen] (Eds.) publication: *Präprintium. Moskauer Bücher aus dem Samizdat. Mit Multimedia CD*, Bremen 1998.

experience. In *Kit* (The Whale, 1970, Petar Vasiliev), television functions as a medium of parody, depicting the socialist-utopian economic successes as a grotesque phantasm. In *Sobaka v jaščike* (Dog in the Box, 1982, Dimitar Petrov), television transforms ideological news programmes into boring, acoustic and visual background noise. In *Interv'ju po zakažu zritelej* (Interview at the Viewers' Request, 1984, Hristo Hristov), it is a live TV broadcast that in the course of the plot creates the tragic divergence of the life story and ideology of the protagonist.

2) The second section, *TV in Post Socialist Art and Media*, opens with Gazinur Gizdatov's article "Эстетика телевидения. Интермедальность в современном искусстве постсоветского Казахстана" (Aesthetics of Television: Intermediality in Contemporary Art of Post-Soviet Kazakhstan). Kazakhstan's political-critical contemporary art of the 1990s to the 2020s refers to television in various fashions: television initially features in artistic projects as a documentary medium. TV pictures and TV-based narrative techniques are then recruited in order to deconstruct present-day, post-socialist (economic) circumstances in absurd scenarios; ultimately, Kazakh art operates with the "sincerity of performances", using television in multimedia constellations with radiophone voices, painting, sculptures and photography.

Bohdan Shumylovych's article "Solid Television: Ukrainian Art of the 1990s and its Media" undertakes a long overdue shift in perspective by examining late and post-Soviet contemporary art of the 1980s and 1990s. He considers Ukrainian contemporary art, which – unlike the Moscow Conceptualism dominating the international art discourse – deals intensively with TV and video technology.³ A central topic in this regard is the transition from the Soviet textual culture to a culture of seeing shaped by cool TV images and their specific noetics. Using a plethora of examples, Shumylovych demonstrates

how Ukrainian artists, often with an eye on traditional panel painting, reflect transformation of the concepts of visibility brought about by television, explore the associated transformation of symbolic and pragmatic approaches to reality and expose the consumerist and pro-toreligious dispositions at play here.

Adam Mazur's article "TV Photobooks: From 'Siberia to Cyberia' by Zofia Kulik and 'TV' by Algirdas Šeškus" introduces two artistic projects in which televisions' performative flow and the pull of its newness are frozen in photographic images in different ways. The Polish artist Zofia Kulik uses her photo camera to capture images mostly from Polish and Russian historiographical television broadcasts. Kulik arranges the photographic evidence, together with written information, in tableaus consisting of individual pictures that ornamentally vanish in their overall aesthetic structure, like the grid structure of a TV picture. An entirely different approach is taken in the photographic project by the Lithuanian television worker and cameraman Algirdas Šeškus, whose photos capture his working environment at the Lithuanian TV station in the 1980s in personal-subjective fashion, whereby the documentary gesture of the TV camera in photographic images comes to nothing.

In her article „Television in the Laugh-Scape of YouTube“, Nadezhda Grigorieva analyses digital video clips in the Russian internet segment of YouTube that have formed an unofficial alternative public sphere, as Russian television stations have been directly or indirectly regulated by the presidential administration since Putin became president in 2000 and thereby secure mass media support for the actions of the state. A particularly suitable genre is talk shows; Grigoreva's analysis shows how YouTube video clips deconstruct this performative attempt to secure community, rendering them the subject of "digital

laughter”. TV pictures’ inherent embodiment is cynically exaggerated to the extent that it becomes obscene and shameless: economic TV consumerism transforms the viewers into objects of autocratic power and control; the distinction between the figure and the actor implodes in an absurd multitude of copies: “retro-utopian” parodies of Soviet *perestroika* television turn out to be proto-Christian fantasies of salvation.

Using two striking examples, Innokentii Urupin’s article “Patriotism as a Return to Suprematism: the History of Television in Andrei Silvestrov’s ‘The Ice Hole’ and Vladimir Sorokin’s ‘White Square’” shows how literature and film since the 2010s reveal Putin’s autocratic rule as being largely produced by the mass medium of television. In the footsteps of Malevič’s and Chlebnikov’s avant-gardist media vision, film and literature expose the media mechanism of this “telecratic” means of securing power and hegemony. Television, which in the 1970s had still dismantled with its performative nowness the socialist utopia invoked by the power of the word, now proves to be a treacherous, cold medium that forces upon the recipient emotive-bodily participation and regressive, protoreligious attitudes yielding to power.

3) The third complex, *Narration, Politics and Laughter in Complex TV*, opens with Lybov Bugaeva’s article “Investigative Journalism and Television”, about the Russian TV series *A Journalist’s Last Article* (2018), which tells the story of two journalists who are friends. Oleg Verchovecv represents the investigative journalism of the late 1980s and 1990s, which was based on the personal eye-witness account of an author operating under cover and reporting findings in print media. In contrast, the style of the 2010s is represented by Aleksej Demin, who saves his friend and colleague from a tricky situation. Demin makes use of the technologically mediated evidence of video recordings that are

further authenticated by the public during their broadcasting on TV. Bugaeva's analysis demonstrates how the series narrates a fundamental paradigm shift: in TV culture, it is not language- and text-based factuality, but communicative success and effectiveness that decide what is true and correct and shape narration and understanding.

Two aspects of the communicative poetics of "Contemporary Television Storytelling" (Mittell 2015) are analysed by Volkha Isakova's article "Scary Funny Television: *Call DiCaprio!* in Local and Global Contexts". On the one hand, the focus is on the 2018 TV series' concept of characters, which is neither psychological in its design nor aimed at promoting identification with them. Instead, the series introduces negative, inconsistently puzzling figures driven by external coercion, entangled in complex circumstances and stuck in various attitudes between cynicism or despair who, as Isakova demonstrates, provide a merciless satire of Russian contemporary culture with its film and TV industry. On the other hand, the series operates with various direct or indirect allusions to figures, topoi and moods from Russian literary classics of the nineteenth century (Puškin, Čechov, Gogol', Saltykov-Ščedrin), from Soviet and international film and from contemporary global TV series.

Stephen Hutching's article "Luminous Heroes for Dark Times: Transculturation, Cosmopolitanism, and the Go-Between as a Double Agent in Channel 'Russia-1' Miniseries *The Optimists*" is concerned with the critical and subversive potential of the 2017/ 2021 miniseries *The Optimists*, which tells of a generational shift in Soviet diplomacy of the 1960s and has proved equally successful with American and Russian audiences. With irony, satire, opaque characterization, switches between intra- and extradiagesis and the superimposition of temporal and spatial (local-cultural and global) frames of reference, the series

shows how recipient followings can be generated simultaneously. With respect to telecratic power consolidation and politics, the series functions as a deconstruction or – as Hutchings puts it – as a “trans-cultural go-between”. This was also the reason why the production of *The Optimists* was placed under the supervision of the presidential administration after the first series and was completely stopped after the director’s criticism of Putin’s bellicose attack on Ukraine since February 2022.

In their piece entitled “Russkii mir i ego granitsy: smečhovaia kul’tura i političeskaia satira (rossijskie i ukrainskie teleserialy)” (Russian World and its Borders: Laugh Culture and Political Satire (Russian and Ukrainian TV Series)), Ilya Kalinin, Konstantin Kaminskij and Anna Zotina investigate the development of post-Soviet, Russian-language TV satire, which reached its zenith in the series *Sluga naroda* (*Servant of the People*, from 2016 onwards). At the same time, this series also marks the watershed at which the cultures of laughter in Russia and Ukraine finally drift apart: in the Ukraine of the Euromaidan civic movement, the comedy and satire of the TV series lead to political action and bring TV entertainer Volodymyr Zelens’kyi’s entry to active politics. In Putin’s “Russian world” satirical TV series emerge as an answer to *Sluga naroda*, but their humour aims to confirm power structures and convey authoritarian nationalism. ♡

Translated from German by John Heath.

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FIG. 1: Erik Bulatov, *Televidenie (Television)*, 1982–1985, 244 cm × 292 cm, oil on canvas. Institute of Contemporary Arts (ed.), 1989: *Erik Bulatov*. Moscow/ London. 83.

FIG. 2: Aleksandr Sokurov, *Sovetskaja élegija (Soviet Elegy)*, 1991), 00:25:00.

FIG. 3: Nam June Paik, *TV-Buddha (1974)*. Herzogenrath, Wulf/ Gaehtgens, Thomas W./ Thomas, Sven/ Hoenisch, Peter (eds.), 1997: *TV-Kultur: Das Fernsehen in der Kunst seit 1879*. Amsterdam/ Dresden. 286.

FIGS. 4–9: Daniel Crooks, *Food for Thought (1994)*. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOIFxUt_GUI].

FIG. 10: Il'ja Kabakov, *Salon im Luxus-Appartement im Hotel 'Perle' in Soči (1981)*, 210 cm × 300 cm, enamel on hardboard. Peschler, Eric. A., 1988: *Künstler in Moskau. Die neue Avantgarde*, Schaffhausen/ Zürich/ Frankfurt am Main. 115.

FIG. 11: Drawing by Jurij Murašov.

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