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# THE POLITICS *of* TELE-TABLOIDS



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MW MEDIAWATCH

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# THE POLITICS OF TELE-TABLOIDS

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## SUMMARY

In this essay I discuss the transformation of television journalism into popular culture, and the ideological effect of this transformation. The analysis is based on the systematic observation of Slovene television news (on *TV Slovenia* and *POP TV*), carried out for several weeks in 1998. A few years ago, the televised “daily news” in this country was still clearly distinct from other television genres in terms of iconography, rhetoric and ideology, as well as in the selection of personalities that featured in it. Today, the news and newscasters are undeniably part of the local showbiz scene. The news as the dissemination and presentation of information has been replaced by the model of the news as styled entertainment and social event. News about politics and famous personalities at important occasions are increasingly becoming stories about chaos in society, and from the communicative point of view they have been modified into an amalgam of common-sense chat, sociability, fatalistic melodrama, visual spectacle, simulation of technological sophistication, super-professionalism, rhetorical simulation of dramatic conflict, and... information. But the central factor in the transformation of the news from a particular, realistic political discourse into a segment of local popular culture lies in the changed role of the newsreader. The newsreader has turned into a newscaster and a trademark of the television institution. On commercial television he/she is deliberately constructed as a public figure, an honest person, a professional who can be trusted as a source of credibility, truthfulness and authenticity for the news. He/she has changed into a narrator of stories, constantly in search of the truth for the benefit of the audience. His/her telegenic image determines the veracity of the news. What is the political effect of this “chatty discourse”? The results can be summarised in the following statements:

1. Providing information is secondary to an audience of entertainment news. The whole iconographical image of the news, the visual style, the para-social relationship of the newscaster with the imaginary audience, and common-sense rhetorical figures define the occasion as a social occasion. There is nothing more dramatic, exciting and entertaining than human dramas in the news.
2. The logic of argument as a mode of substantiation is rarely seen in the logic of individual news items. A problem, or



event, is narrated in the manner of a moral dilemma. The main task of the news is to offer a moral judgement of the world. Who is the good guy, who is the bad guy, who has won? Such news fatalistically moralises about the world, rather than morally thematises it – just like other melodramatic genres.

3. Events are narrated within the referential field of personal experience and common sense. The common sense is ideological, of course, but it is instituted as natural. It is founded on the presumption of fundamental, undeniable, universal truths.
4. The circulation of the news presenter in other media constructs him/her as a personality, who can be believed and trusted, and who can interpret the world on our behalf. Our confidence in the credibility of the news draws upon his/her charisma and honesty rather than the credibility of the argument.
5. Entertainment news substitutes the consideration of politics with the consideration of society. News about political corruption is also narrated as a human story about “the world of licentious and spoiled politics”.
6. This does not mean, however, that realistic “informative news” is less ideological. There is no reason whatsoever why news about society (family violence, social life of the local elite, unimportant people in exceptional situations, and so forth) as such should be politically less relevant and more trivial than news about the superior echelons of state and party politics. The private, of course, is political. In fact, these two spheres are only divided by a series of evaluations and representations, which form the basis for the production of the specific version of an event.
7. All of the above applies to both the television institutions studied, except that the news programme on the public service television station occasionally does everything stated above, but at the same time freely change its communicative dynamics from informative journalism to tabloid journalism, together with the changing of newscasters – which points to the unclear idea about what kind of pattern the news should use as a model.

## THE GREAT SPLIT

The news plays a central economic role for the television institution. It ritualises patterns of television watching, and serves to form a routine. It represents the trademark of the institution, and is often the principal element of its corporate identity. It is still perceived as one of the main segments of public discourse, and thus research into the characteristics of television news in a specific cultural setting is also research into the characteristics of public life in that cultural setting. Today - when newscasters appear on hoarding posters; when they are turning into commercial objects, trademarks, and local celebrities; when they live their secondary lives in the social chronicles of tabloids; when they compete for best-dressed local celebrity; when they expose minor secrets about the private lives of the local showbiz in their articles; and when the news has finally become part of local popular culture - this is more true than ever. Obviously news can no longer be viewed as a distinct genre that “transmits information”, since tele-tabloid journalism mixes politics with popular culture, information with “entertainment”, melodrama with information, information with moralising, investigation with chat.

Tele-tabloids substitute reflections on politics with reflections on society, political information with thematisation of the moral order (and disorder) in society. Although news concerning the resignation of a minister, or corruption within a political party, belongs to the sphere of serious politics, popular journalism narrates it in terms of melodramatic moralising on the dirty world of politics. This essay is a criticism of the chatty discourse in news-entertainment. This does not mean, however, that the conventions of standard informative political journalism, in which the bodiless spirit of the newsreader impersonally and impartially reads the news about famous personalities and major events in high-level politics, are less ideological, less excluding, and more emancipatory. The tabloid news is just like the news in general, only a little more so, claims Peter Dahlgren.

Generally we can talk about three main modifications in television journalism in recent times, and all of them are related to modifications in the form of the news.

(a) *The relationship between visual and verbal representation* is modified. The tabloid news are aesthetic visual spec-

tacles, visual mastering of increasingly short and increasingly fast-changing sequences. It is precisely special visual techniques and their simulation of authenticity, which make the news seem more real than reality itself. The visual simulation of reality and the visual affirmation of authenticity, credibility and veracity, as styles of argumentation, co-exist with another important modification in television journalism.

(b) Events are increasingly presented through narrations concerning two-dimensional conflicts. They are transformed into *dramatic stories*, into clearly polarised (melo) dramas.

(c) The third main modification is *personification of journalism*, or the transfer from *objective to subjective news discourse*. The personification, or subjectivisation of journalistic language has several aspects: the narration of events as “human interest stories”, the use of individual experience as a referential framework for the understanding of structural phenomena, focusing on individual experiences and the emotional states of victims of or witnesses to an event, the similarity of television language to everyday language, chatty mannerism, simulation of the chatty, face-to-face communication between the newsreader and the audience, planned and systematic construction of the meta-textual identity of newsreaders as celebrities, and so forth.

Despite these modifications, the professional ideology of popular television journalism is still based on the concept of objectivity and referentialism – journalism should only impartially describe real events, and the audience of the “daily news” should only see them as a record of the past day. In accordance with such ideology it continues to employ the familiar conventions of documentary-realistic political journalism. On the other hand, however, the television news broadcast is becoming an increasingly chatty *social genre*, in which the main emphasis is placed on communication rather than information, while the audience consumes it ritually rather than instrumentally. In general, the news is a mixture of subjective and objective modes of presentation. One of the most important aspects of the transition from objective to subjective news discourse, which will be discussed in detail in this paper, is *the role of the “newsreader”*. The ideal of objectivity in the news requires that the narrator is anonymous and barely perceptible and that the narration should be transparent – the events speak for themselves. In objective journalism, the pantheon of individuals appearing on the screen is so nu-

merous that the audience is unable to associate the news with a few selected, unique newscasters. Tele-tabloids, on the other hand, require a narrator who guarantees the veracity of the news. Thus the formerly humble newsreaders have turned into “marketing objects”, and, to varying degrees, they have become bizarre and charismatic local celebrities and national “super-subjects”.

From the economic perspective, newscasters serve the same purpose as celebrities in other spheres of cultural production: a celebrity represents capital and investment, which sells the news and organises the market for all the other programmes. On the commercial *POP TV*, the production of celebrities/public personalities out of newsreaders has been systematic and deliberate, while on the Slovene public service television channel it was the spontaneous result of the “mythological partnership” between tabloids and celebrities of all kinds, including those from local journalism. These personalities are consciously constructed not only as *omni-informed, technologically competent super-professionals and universal authorities*, but also as “ordinary people” who work on our behalf. They have become unique personalities, the central element in the narration of the news as a whole, the main source of credibility and the precondition of the veracity of the news.

The construction of personality from newsreader is a basis for the construction of reality in the news. However, the news should also entertain. The male or female newsreader - or the couple - leads us through the text, orders facts within a generally accepted, common-sense value system, connects different mini-stories into a unified whole, and stimulates, influences, and “fixes” the process of meaning construction in the news. In this essay we will explore how the modified role of newscaster within the general structure of the news changes the mode in which the news creates an impression of credibility, and how his/her secondary existence as a local celebrity affects the news discourse. These questions are part of a wider issue concerning the features of the political language that these changes help to constitute.

When the news represents an event in terms of a clearly polarised drama about the struggle between good and evil, when it offers a moral judgement on the world, when the aesthetic visualisation of the television news can create a sense of familiarity and trust between the newsreader and the audience in their living rooms, and when the news is

read in an intimate and chatting manner by a man/woman who can be trusted, since he/she investigates, seeks out and exposes the truth on our behalf, the news plays the same role as other pseudo-therapeutic discourses within popular media culture. Thus the news exists in the same range as other, more explicit techniques of the self-thematisation of the individual. Its function is similar to the pseudo-therapeutic discourse of magazines aimed at the advancement of life style, television talk-shows, the pseudo-psychology of self-help literature, or advertisements that sell experience rather than product. It connects primary and secondary (media) experiences, which were formerly more clearly separated, and satisfies similar needs as the pseudo-therapeutic, fictional or semi-fictional entertainment which is currently flourishing. Together with other public and private discourses, the news forms part of the range of techniques for the control of the self. It performs the same function as “advisors” crowding round us to serve our need for *self-thematisation and moralisation*.

In this respect, today’s journalism can not be treated as a special political discourse that speaks of real events, and it is useless to insist on the superiority of the objectified information. Television journalism is part of local popular culture and the news should be understood as *representations*, and *not* as “the reflection of today’s events”, or *presentation*. The pleasure we experience from news-entertainment stems from its daily reconstruction of self-consciousness: the news gives us the feeling that the past day was filled with events, in contrast with the viewer’s empty everyday existence, where nothing special ever takes place. Or, to use the words of the Canadian guru of commercial television, Moses Znaimer: “The best television tells me what happened *today – to me*.”

It is obvious in this context that the communicative aspect of popular journalism (the social or “ritual” aspect of communication) is more important in terms of the comprehension of the politics of this language than in terms of its informative aspect. Its iconography speaks of its ideology. Thus the form of the news (its iconography and communicative dynamics) reveals more about the characteristics of public life, which the news helps to create, than its more explicit political aspects, such as the selection and evaluation of the events that become television news, for example. For this reason the popular news is apolitical, or it presumably trivialises high politics only inasmuch as we

understand communication – just like the “informative” approach to communication – as the transfer of messages, and politics in the narrow sense as a decision-making process within the framework of the governmental politics of the state. Here politics is not a part of the overall social construction of meaning, and communication is merely a mediator of ideas and extant relationships created elsewhere. But if we see every struggle for meaning as a political struggle, and if relationships are being established through communication, the frontier between what is political and what is social in a given society becomes fluid and unclear.

Therefore I do not see why news about family violence would be any less relevant politically than news about the replacement of a minister. Behind a news story about family violence there is always a meta-story about power and authority in family, sexual and generational domination, violence, and so on. If we no longer presume the superiority of the objectified information on the governmental politics of the state, emancipatory news only differs from non-emancipatory news in terms of the value propositions according to which, in every mini-story included in the news, and in the news as a whole, a consensus with the audience is achieved. This consensus is about questions: What does the news presuppose about me? What does it say about my interests and values? Why should I be interested in the social types that it presents? They differ in terms of discourse, which forms the basis upon which a story is narrated. The story, of course, can be common-sense folklore, chauvinism, or nationalism.

Thus, the popular news is not political only because it favours certain views more than others, and certain spheres of reality more than others, but also because it constructs some cultural constellations as natural while placing others outside the common-sense. Ideology in the popular news is thus not evident – the news does not lie and manipulate us, it does not speak untruths (at least generally), but rather it colonises our common sense. The news is becoming more and more a poetic discourse, and less and less a cognitive one. We do not agree with it, nor do we reject it, since it is omni-present and permeating. Thus, in the context of this analysis, ideology can be defined as a common-sense interpretation of the world, and not as false information; as a meaning implied in the rhetoric of the news, and not as a declarative statement.

I was primarily interested in the question of how the

new role of the main narrator of all the mini-stories, in his/her capacity as a special public personality, influences the political effect of this presumably apolitical journalism. The essay that follows is based on several weeks of systematic observation of the television news on the Slovene public service television and on the commercial channel, *POP TV*. I was not concerned with the extent to which the picture of the world presented in the news is distorted, or with whether the stories in the news were adequate representations of events. The main question was: what iconographic and communicative means are used in the news to give it the impression of veracity and credibility in its representation of the world? All other questions are merely derived from the first one: What kind of society is being constructed in the news stories? In what way is meaning being constructed in the news? In what manner is this meaning fixed and, ultimately, naturalised?

Since the symbolic organisation of a certain domain is not a logical result of its economic organisation, we can not speak of two kinds of the news (e.g., the rationally realistic news on Slovene public service television, and the tabloid news on *POP TV*). The genre iconography and professional ideology of the news on public service television are only occasionally different. It does everything stated above, only to a lesser extent, it is less organised, and its simulation of authenticity is frequently visually and verbally less skilful. It does all this with an unclear and shifting idea of which news format would best serve them as an ideal according to which the news could be modelled.

## 1. THE TIRANNY OF CHATTING AND COMMON SENSE

The common sense and popular voice are more important in tele-tabloids than expertise, the visual dramatisation more important than information, the art of chatting and the story, or editing, more important than argumentation. In this way the news – at the beginning of the nineties still formally strictly separated from the “entertainment” part of the programme – is becoming a part of popular culture, and newscasters are becoming national “super-subjects” and important topics of other media. It is increasingly difficult to defend and maintain both the structural difference between “information” and “entertainment” (generally speaking, between factual and fictional genres) and the assumption about the superiority of objective information.

In comparison with the traditional format of television news, in television tabloids it is not primarily the selection of news that is modified, but rather the whole *communication dynamics*. Although the genre of news is a mixture of chat, information, commentary, melodrama, and visual spectacle, it still carries information, but people watch it as a popular genre. We shall try to indicate that information is secondary to the news audience. The principal aim of the news is *a moral judgement of the world*. The television news transforms separate events into a meaningful narration, and constructs the television text as a story. Once mainly rationalistic news discourse now more and more frequently contains a moralising element – events are *being narrated as moral dilemmas*. In moral dramas of the television “soft news”, collective and institutional phenomena are understood within the framework of personal experience. A clearly polarised basic drama between *good and evil* takes place in the news just as in the classic melodramatic texts of popular culture. Tabloids shifted from the objective to the subjective news discourse: the tabloid news stories offer an image of the world firmly rooted within the universe of daily life. Institutions are personalised, and stories told from the perspective of victims, or eyewitnesses. At work are immediacy, the sense of proximity, and the reduction of the objective distance so typical of the classic news.

The characteristics of contemporary tele-tabloids are a strong emphasis on the *visual aestheticisation of the news* (from sophisticated graphics to stylisation of the



news presenter), rhetoric simulation of the dramatic conflict in narration, an incredible pace of presentation, abandoning of rational realism, and, in first and foremost, *personalisation of the anchor*. This means that *the news presenter-reader* is characterised as a *television personality*. *The subjectivisation of news* – primarily *the verbal and visual construction of events into stories*, “happy chat”, and *the construction of the local celebrity out of television news presenter* – is the paramount change in the television news of the last decade. Moreover, the subjectivisation of this journalism illustrates a tendency evident also in other genres: the shift of television from reporting about the reality to self-referentiality and construction of reality, immediacy, and authenticity in the news. Thus, as claims P. Dahlgren, the tabloid news is just like the news in general, only a little more so.

Of course, the process of the transformation of the journalistic public discourse into the “discourse of chatty mannerism” at the crossroads of advertisement, information and fun, implies new and different forms of “apolitical” political language. Since politics cannot be discussed separately from popular culture, the change in format means not only formal or aesthetic modifications, but also a change that plays the central role in the constitution of the meaning of the news. What really changes is *the politics of representation in the news*. The connection between politics and popular culture is evident through the transformation of aesthetic into ethical, in a moral judgement that is also an aesthetic judgement at the same time. A critique of *the discourse of “happy talk”* and an analysis of *the aesthetic iconography of the television space* (set design, image of the newscasters, graphics) and *melodramatic storytelling* do not mean that we are pleading for a return to the objectivist conception of the news, to the neutral figure of the news-reader-mediator of the news, and to *hard news* journalism. Journalistic objectivism is far from being a non-ideological, non-constructed and transparent reflection of the world. Quite the contrary. But there is a difference between the traditional news and the tabloid news in the manner of establishing the authority, realism, and authenticity of news with strictly defined verbal and visual codes. The documentary-realistic-objectified news and the entertainment news differ primarily in the visual and verbal codes and conventions employed to convince us that the news reflects the world, that it is a set of daily events objectively and impartially conveyed by trustworthy and credible na-

tional “super-subjects”.

Or, in other words: the ideological effect of the television tabloids is not to be sought primarily in the modified content of the news and the modified selection of events, but rather in the rhetoric and iconography of the television space: the colour of the news presenter’s jacket, which must connote neutral professionalism, the dramatisation of his voice, the banter and exchange of looks between the news presenters and with the audience, the iconography of the title sequence - and in the meanings that these devices connote. Of course, the selection is the first level of interpretation in the news. The exclusion of certain spheres of reality from the discussion, or their classification as less important, means to interpret the world. But the television tabloid news mainly follows the traditional categorisation of the world and the established news values, either implicit in the minds of journalists, or formalised and legitimised as a necessary element of professional journalism.

In this essay on the television genre that is supposed to be the closest to reality, while it should actually use all verbal and visual means merely to construct the impression of the transparent reflection of reality, we shall try to disclose the principles in which this genre represents, interprets and controls reality. The analysis will be based on the following propositions:

1. The news must create the impression of truthfulness and accountable authority. With this aim it employs a whole series of instruments – from the categorisation of the news into categories of “domestic politics”, “foreign politics”, “economy”, “culture”, and so forth, to the visual image of the news’ title sequence, set design, and, not least important, the personality of the news presenter. The main instrument for the foundation of authenticity and authority in the tabloid news is the transformation of humble news-readers into television personalities fully supporting the station’s corporate image and guaranteeing the “veracity” of the news and the credibility of interpretation. Nowadays this is the principal instrument for the foundation of truthfulness and trustfulness in news broadcast, and the reflection of the “subjectivisation” of the news during the last decade.
2. The news should employ both the textual devices and the visual image to construct the impression that it is a transparent and immediate reflection of reality. The interaction of narratives; chat between either the news presenters themselves, or between the news presenters and imaginary

audience; pictures from the “scene of event”; graphic visualisation of the event; and graphic lettering – all these make the news function as if it were a non-mediated, immediate, transparent and objectified view of reality.

3. The secret of the success of the news is in its entertainment, gossip, and melodramatic moral evaluation of the world, offered in the essential element of the news – a story. The news is most convincing if it represents events which correspond to our established patterns of reality, but which are also not entirely predictable. Each day we listen anew to the same old things. Narration introduces the moral dimension into reporting on reality, it produces suspense within the time sequence. Part of the pleasure is to be found in the endless replaying of everyday moral dilemmas, of posing questions and proposing answers to them. The news extends individual moral affairs into public life – just like other melodramatic genres.

The construction of the news as the stories of the moral dilemmas of society is the mechanics of combining pre-prepared and already used items, and a constant *placing of people and events into stories about two-dimensional conflicts, and interpretation of and moralisation about their behaviour*. Political corruption, for example, always presents a good moral story – like news about the illegal spending of budget funds by a political party that has built its political identity and distinctness on the image of an “honest” party and its honest policy. What a good story! Political corruption in general is a well-known pattern, a ready-made story, while the unexpected dishonesty of the “honest” party creates a slight difference, an element of unpredictability and a new combination. Since a story is always produced according to the demands of discourse, it has – so to speak – already been written, since it was part of the common-sense ideology even before told by the journalist. The new situation has been adapted to old definitions: people and events are placed into existing categories. The narrative discourse thus offers a formulaic understanding of the world, and the moralisation of reality.

But the news does not merely narrate individual events, placing them into familiar categories into which the world is divided, but rather it treats the whole world as one single story. The news maintains the illusion of the narrative conjunction of different spheres of reality by means of a dialogue between the newscasters, or by means of relating two entirely separate news items.

"Physicians are thus not satisfied, and also dissatisfied are fishermen. Yesterday, the fishermen of Izola ..." (*TV SLO*).

"In America, the number of criminal acts is growing constantly. Yesterday a body was found ..." (*POP TV*).

"Thus the Štajerska people invite you to Lent. And we invite you to ..." (*POP TV*).

## 2. WE DO IT FOR YOU

### 2.1. NEWSPRESENTER – THE GUARANTEE OF TRUTH

The transformation of documentary-realistic political journalism into the sophisticated iconographic manipulation of the television space is about a different *foundation and maintenance of the impression of authority, of the transparent reality and credibility* of the “entertainment news”. Today, the news is generally a mixture of the *subjective and objective modes of presentation*. This is true of the news broadcast both on *TV SLO* and on *POP TV*. While this mixture - which can lean to the subjective or objective sides - on public service television is a casual result of the news presenter’s individual journalistic style and perception of the practice of newscasting, or newsreading, in the presentation of news, the mixture at *POP TV* is the result of a planned editorial reflection on the journalistic practice of the news narrator. Or, better, it is an adaptation of the scheme of the tele-tabloid news, which has been institutionalised for over a decade, and which serves it as a supreme model to be imitated.

The trend towards the subjectivisation of the news is probably irreversible, since it is a result of the general decline in and questioning of the ideology of objectivity not only in journalism, but also in science and philosophy. The subjectivisation of presentation is most obviously articulated in the central role of the news presenter-personality and his/her communication with the imaginary viewers. The creation of personality, or *the personalisation of the news-reader* is thus the basis for the construction of reality in the news, which should entertain. The news presenter’s personality is the source of authenticity, it assures the credibility of the news. The news presenter is our bridge to reality. The news presenter is a guarantee of truth. He/she assures the “veracity” of the news, and creates the impression of the truthfulness of interpretation. The news presenter is an institution, a representative of the news, the trademark of the television institution, a national figure, and an ombudsman for the interest of ordinary people. His/her otherwise humble charisma, which points to his/her “typicalness” rather than distinctness, is constructed so as to invoke trust and convey the impression of an honest person. At the same time, however, the news presenters are delib-

erately constructed as omni-informed, impartial and super-professional (this is especially true at *POP TV*).

For behind the (seemingly) attractive fragility lurks power, resoluteness and proficiency. ... Both Darjas are professionals who perform their jobs with love and as well as they can. (Darja & Darja – Devilish Women, *Jana* magazine.)

The news presenter in the classic news has no body, he/she is a spirit conveying the news with an enraptured and, to some degree or another, solemn voice. The news presenters, these once relatively humble figures who *read* the news, have now turned into celebrities, local stars representing the focal point of the discourse in the news. They are not merely man-machines mediating the news, but the *personalities* responsible for declaration, who ask and investigate and are even prepared to risk their reputation for their audience. They have to give the impression that they are fully convinced of the truth they narrate, and that they are deeply engaged in the issues on which they report. These *super-subjects* constitute the pantheon of individuals, who guarantee - through their personal authority – the credibility of the news, and speak in their own names (or so it seems). They themselves have become the issues of other media, just like the stories about celebrities they narrate.

## 2.2. MEDIATOR

News presenters have a mythical role as *the mediator of events*; they speak to us, but at the same time they establish the link between the television company, its field reporters, and the personalities they are talking about in the news. The news presenter in the mythical role as the representative of the audience and mediator of the news asks questions in our name, to the individual interviewed in the studio for example, or plays the role of mediator between the viewer and the field reporter, or merely interprets a reporter's account.

Andreja, good evening.

Good evening, Darja.

What can we expect to happen tonight in Križanke?

Well, ...

And how many events will there be in the framework of the whole

Festival?

In the framework ...

Andreja, thank you for that information.

The so-called *stake-out*, when a reporter stands - usually towards the end of his/her account - in front of the location from which he/she is reporting (the National Assembly building, for example), or in front of the location that serves as a metonymical substitute for the events about which he/she is reporting (in front of the Ministry of Labour while reporting on the pension reform, or in front of a primary school while reporting on conflicts regarding primary school curricular reform), creates the impression that the reporter is not speaking directly to the audience, but to the news presenter, the representative of the institution

Janez Kovač for *24 Hours* from Gornja Radgona;  
from Kosovska Mitrovica for *24 Hours*. Valentin Areh,

who conveys this unmediated reality further to the viewers. This communication even strengthens the impression that the news is objective, for it confirms the role of reporter as reporter-detective constantly roving around the world in the quest for news, and the role of news presenter as mediator between transparent reality and our domestic setting.

In this case, the event which a reporter conveys to the news presenter-mediator, and which the latter mediates further to the audience, is in principle merely symbolised in order for the news to simulate reality: a school stands for curricular reform; children in a playground stand for the conflicts in the National Curriculum Council; a farm house stands for the family conflict which ended in murder; mangled cars by the roadside stand for the accident which happened hours before the reporter could arrive at the place of event. The visual evidence should correspond with the story, not with the event. *Communication is more important than information, and the visualisation of the story is more important than the visualisation of the event, or reality.* Or not even that: at television stations which are less skilled at constructing reality, the visualisation itself can serve as the authentication of the story. Together with the report on social policy in Slovenia, broadcast some months ago on Slovene public service television, we could see citizens of Ljubljana (shot from the knees down) walking across

the Three Bridges in the rain. In June of this year they were already becoming more aware of the need for the simulation of authenticity, and they even exaggerated it a little. When the police caught Bangladeshi refugees at the Italian border, they performed the capture in front of the cameras. Upon the arrival of the reporters they had obviously told the refugees to go into the grass and acted out a scene of professional capture: the police van drove up, several policemen jumped out of it, and one of them “vigorously” instructed the refugees to raise their hands. Evidently, the main plot of the story was not the refugees, but the capability of the Slovene police to restore order.

Thus the news presenter-personality is the *institutional voice*, and the reporter is the *accessed voice* (these two concepts are used by J. Hartley, 1982). The news presenter is a representative of the institution, and its trademark. When he/she presents the news, he/she uses accessed voices (reporters, interviewed experts, and people interviewed on the street) and appropriates them to *construct* the impression of the veracity, truthfulness, authenticity and objectivity of the news through the combination of institutional discourse and accessed discourses. The appropriated accessed voices function as citations, which we can randomly select and appropriate and include in our own text, and thus legitimate our own discursive vision by means of apparently authentic empirical evidence. The use of the “vox pop” as the accessed voice (or *vox pop* interviews) is the most ideological use of accessed voice as citation, for it is the most casual and arbitrary, and it offers to the journalist the widest possibilities for manipulation (and, of course, supports his/her laziness to the greatest extent). It re-codes the problem as trivial, it gives a special weight to popular “common sense”, even if the *vox pop* is racist, chauvinist, or utterly ignorant.

When the news presenter-mediator interviews a guest in the studio, or via satellite transmission, he/she asks questions that are supposed to reflect the concerns of the audience (the concerns that the news presenter assumes that everyone share, of course). The news presenter poses questions to guests, or *accessed voices*, which every informed viewer could ask them. The news presenter is a mediator between the domestic setting of the viewer and the public worlds represented by the events in the news, and the personalities who appear in them. This connection is more clearly established at *POP TV*, namely by “difficult ques-



tions". Difficult, unpleasant questions asked by the news presenter-institution, only enhance his/her mediatory role, or even the role of the "reporter- watchdog", caught between us, the viewers in our own private spheres, and public personalities, whom he/she controls instead of us. The facts must be ascertained because of the audience. The strategy of asking questions on behalf of ordinary people facilitates an easier identification of the audience with the news presenter, for he/she asks questions that "we" would pose to public personalities, if only we had the chance:

Well, what about ...

And what about confidence in ...

And finally, very briefly, about the following: ...

Is life better, worse, the same?

Thank you very much.

The mediatory role involves the viewer and relates him/her with the news presenter's view of the issue, it clarifies the narrative suspense, and establishes the grounds for the mediatory role of the news presenter. The more the news presenter endeavours to be coded as neutral, the less it is necessary that he/she has an opinion. The consequence of the self-assumed neutral position is the absence of the problematisation and interpretation of the issue, and thus the reduction of the journalist's position to the mediator of someone else's discursive vision. The journalist's only role is the "neutral" mediation of other people's statements.

The whole iconography of Slovene public service television connotes neutrality and impartiality rather than professionalism and authenticity (as is the case with *POP TV*). The higher the hierarchic status of the interviewee, the more the interviewers (journalists, reporters) place themselves in the position of neutral mediator of the interviewee's statements, rather than the mediator between the domestic setting of the viewer and the world outside, as is the case with *POP TV*. The journalists are thus reduced to being *mediators of the discursive visions of the main political actors*.

Within journalism there are several perceptions of "ideal journalistic practice". Thus there is not one sole ideal form of journalism, but many alternative forms: journalism as an objective practice; investigative journalism; literary journalism; and the "human interest" approach. The application of primarily this or that ideal form depends on

the institutional concept of journalistic practice, and on the perception of the normative role, which the media institution should fulfil. *In no ideal form is the journalist reduced only to a technical instrument for conveying the discursive vision of someone else.* For even objectivity as a journalistic ideal does not imply the absence of problematisation and interpretation.

The ideal of objectivity on Slovene public service television is frequently misunderstood as a bare mediation of other people's statements. A typical example of such practice is an interview with a prominent politician. The journalist poses merely *general, descriptive, non-problematic questions frequently asked in public.* Problematic questions have to be based on data that enable the journalist to legitimise his/her questioning of the issue, or event. Even if the politician skilfully evades the question, the journalist takes no notice, and does not lead the politician back to the original question. The journalist does not assert his/her own data, which would serve to authenticate his/her questions and to question and dispute the dominant interpretation, against the politician's data (which is certainly indispensable to the authentication of his/her own statements). The interviewer does not cut short the lengthy statements of the prominent guest, which generally exceed the time and framework of the question asked. Thus, the politician does not need to be factual and realistic, but can uphold his/her main motivation: to assert his/her own interpretation of the issue, his/her own discursive vision of the political situation, or event, and his/her own definition of the problem. This is only possible because of the absence of the journalist's own interpretation of the matter, which would be based on the assembled data and investigation. Only such advance temporary interpretation would enable the journalist to confront the interviewee's interpretation.

The reduction of the journalist's role to the mediatory role releases him/her from *responsibility for the consequences of his/her own journalistic activity.* At the same time it places him/her in a state of dependence on the official sources of information. *The interpretations of the best institutionally organised sources (be it of corporations, or political parties)* thus become the most influential public interpretations. In this way, the journalists renounce whatever public role and place themselves in the role of "talking heads". They do not need to explore affairs with prudent journalistic investigation, which would lay the foundations for the inter-

pretation of the event, and on the basis of which they would be able to ask questions on behalf of the viewers.

Thus some journalists – with their editor’s approval, or even encouragement – adopt the role of incompetent, non-autonomous and “impersonal” mediator. As a consequence of this role, the selection of the presented themes and their interpretation (“agenda building”) are left to sources instead of independent media. Such a reduction of the journalistic role enables the pressure groups, parties and corporations (and their highly professionalised public relations services) to define which issues in the public debate will be perceived as important, what will be concealed, what will be the dominant interpretation of events to circulate in the public, and what interpretations will be absent, or explicated as non-legitimate.

### 2.3. PERSONA

On the other hand, visual codes contribute to the making of personality out of a newsreader. A whole set of visual codes personalises the news presenter. The visual image is the most important means in creating the impression of the competence of television personalities, and of the veracity, factuality, and objectivity of statements and the mediatory role of television. The *mise en scène* of communication in the news, together with the entire visualisation of the event, communicate the meaning even before a single word has been spoken. Only a minor part of the audience (8 %) pays attention to the contents of the news, 42 % to the appearance of the speaker, and 50 % to the manner of speaking (e.g., see the data in S. Ewen, 1988). The meaning of the news, and thus also its decoding on the part of the audience, depends on its structure and aestheticisation rather than its contents: the visual and verbal rhetoric, the contextual reconstruction of events in the story, the dramatisation of voice, the status of the news presenter-narrator, the aestheticisation of television space. The mode of presentation of the news is closely related to the manner in which the news’ discourse establishes its credibility and authenticity; how it affirms its supposedly direct connection with reality, its authority and truthfulness. The mode of communication, and the image and impression of the speaker are essential to the viewers’ perception of the truthfulness and authority of the news presenter. The image of the news thus influences the

understanding of the message or, in other words, the *outlook of the news itself largely defines its popularity*.

The technique of personalisation of the news presenter (construction of the newsreader as a television personality), which is also the technique of making the event on screen more authentic and closer to reality (which POP TV uses in abundance), consists of *the division of the television space into two fields*: in the “first order space” with the news presenter, and the “second order space” (H. Zettl, 1989), where the reporter communicates with the news presenter in the first order space. Thus the second order space can be static or moving picture-graphics above the left or right shoulder of the news presenter, or it can present a reporter who is reporting live from the field, who talks with the news presenter acting as a mediator between him/her and the viewers. The division of the television space into two segments – the space of the news presenter and the space of the reporter, or graphics – makes the first order space with the news presenter more realistic. At the moment when the space of the news presenter is accentuated by the presence of the second order space, this produces the widening of the space with the news presenter into our actual living space. The second order space (a framed picture of Litostrój, for example) is perceived as a statement about reality, and the first order space of the news presenter as the reality itself. The news presenter becomes human, we perceive him/her as a person, a mediator between ourselves and the real world outside. The personification or humanisation of the news presenter is even more effective if the news presenter communicates frequently with the interviewee or field reporter in the second order space.

Our team is there too ... Špela, what's going on? ...  
But will the politicians also join in the party? ...  
Thank you, Špela, and have fun, of course.

Thus the news presenter not only mediates between ourselves and the world, but places him/herself – just as in cases of “difficult questions” - in the position of the viewer. The communication between the news presenter and the reporter constitutes the news presenter as a mediator between us, the audience, and the *reporter-detective* out there in the field. At the same time, all three features – the *visual manipulation* of the news, which affirms the news presenter's

status; the *meta-textual identity of the newscaster* as a national personality with his/her own secondary life in other popular media; and the *conversational interaction* between the newscaster and the audience – contribute to the *personification of the newscaster*. The greater the frequency of communication between the newscaster and those in the second order space (reporters, interviewees), and the more frequent the use of the fragmentation of space in the news broadcast, and of the visual fragmentation in general, the more the visual image of the news contribute to the veracity of the newscaster, his/her mediatory role, popularity, and even to the authority of the newscaster/programme/television institution.

#### 2.4. THE SUPER-PROFESSIONAL

If, on the one hand, the newscaster is an honest and good man/woman who “works for us”, a watchdog, on the other hand he/she should give the impression of professionalism, authority and neutrality. In the popular news there is always a contradiction between the newscaster’s enthusiasm, involvement, “ordinariness” on the one hand, and the requirement that the newscaster also connotes the *authority and objectified neutrality of professional super-newscaster*, and the authority and neutrality of the institution which he/she represents. Thus the dress code, or studio set design, or the desk, is even more emphasised than before, for the newscaster also has to be visually coded as professional, serious, and authoritative.

The pale grey-beige colour of the set in the background of the news at the Slovene public service television connotes *neutrality*, while the naturalistic scenery at POP TV connotes *professionalism*, *immediacy* and *topicality*, as some of the reporters, who move between monitors in the background, or work behind computer screens, can bring the latest news to the scene at any moment. A table - within the established visual codes – generally speaks of the school atmosphere and of authority. It might be obvious by now how strict and fixed is the iconography of the news, and how even the newscasters’ wardrobes contribute to the impression of their professionalism and authority, and to the status of the institution which they represent. Therefore it is even more strange that the outfit of the newscasters on Slovene public service television freely depends on their good or bad taste, and not on the con-

cept of the programme producers about the corporate identity and role of the news presenter in the overall iconography of the news broadcast. A news presenter in a bright yellow jacket, or a female news presenter in a cheap, poorly-fitting synthetic blouse, hardly connotes professionalism, authority, efficiency, and success.

The news presenter is not supposed to show emotions or involvement in the story he/she narrates, and should connote neutrality and objectivity. His/her predominantly neutral language characterises him/her, and the television institution he/she represents, as being impartial. The contrast between the engaged, chatting news presenter, taken as our man/woman whom we can trust since he/she investigates and questions on our behalf, on the one hand, and the neutral super-professional on the other hand, is the main “ideological effect” of the entertainment news. Both discourses – *chatty mannerism* and *neutral documentary realism* – coexist and mutually interchange. The chatty style, the compassion, the friendly attitude, and dramatisation combine all the time with the impersonal linguistic code, omni-informed professionalism and visualisation connoting the immediacy, realism, and technological sophistication of the news: the fast-paced presentation of the news and interviews, the neutral and professional - “working” - clothes, the scenography, the desk, the hierarchical relationship between the news presenter and all the other voices in the news (reporters, interviewees). This duality is also evident in textbook instructions, which speak of the role and personality of the news presenter, listing the qualities that the news presenter should possess: on the one hand, *authority, credibility, full professionalism*; but also, on the other hand, *human warmth, a pleasant and characteristic voice, and an amiable and distinctive appearance* (see T. Perovič, Š. Šipek, 1998, pp. 96-97).

## 2.5. IN THE CLUTCHES OF FAME

The deconstruction of the news broadcast should be intertextual in order to reveal the constructed nature of the news, and to demythologise the news as “the mirror of reality”. Since the creation of personality is the basis for the construction of reality (and control) in the news, we shall consider whether the creation of a *personality* from a *newsreader* also takes place outside television, and we will thus need to read television in the context of national popu-

lar culture in general. Namely, the viewers are familiar with the non-verbal codes (of dress, face work, dramatisation of voice, and verbal, graphic, and scenographic codes) from the world outside television – the television codes merely borrow the social symbolism, only to reinterpret it in a new context. This is why the news presenter can always be “too intelligent”, “not attractive enough”, or “too old”, “too young”, or “too handsome”, and can lose his/her job not because of incompetence, but because of, for example, youth, which is supposed to connote immaturity and a lack of authority. Or, conversely: a talking head without journalistic competence is a successful personality, because he/she has got the perfectly balanced image of a competent, experienced, middle-aged professional and trustworthy ordinary person. That is to say, an authoritative and convincing image is just as important as credibility itself. The impression of competence and looking good on television are more important than competence itself.

Since the news depends upon borrowing from social symbolism, it is placed side by side with advertising. Namely, advertising enables the constant flow of meanings from the cultural world to the world of consumer goods. In advertising, the cultural order constantly relates to the order of things: advertising borrows the symbolism of society (symbols of love, status, “well-being”, happy family life, and so forth) and transfers it – by means of a commercial – to the advertised products. In an ad for a fruit yoghurt, for example, the culturally constructed image of responsible motherhood is transferred to the advertised product, a vitaminised yoghurt for children. The use of visual and verbal codes - connoting authority, trustworthiness, professionalism, and competence in society - in the news transfers this social symbolic iconography to the news presenter, and thus to the product, the news itself. The transfer of this symbolism can be attained through a deliberate design of the corporate image of the institution, through the promotion of television personalities (*POP TV* with hoarding posters, postcards, and ads), or through the indirect promotion of the television news presenters-personalities in talk-shows, games and quizzes on other television programmes, and in the social chronicles of tabloids, whose main aim is the exposure of the private lives of the television personalities for the public.

1. The News presenters of *24 Hours*: Freshness Conquers

Darja Zgonc, Boštjan Lajovic, Nataša Pirc, Sandi Salkič

It is something quite terrible to pose six identical questions to four unique persons ... (*Stop* magazine)

2. Devilish Women

They are both blond, gentle, pretty women. Darja Zgonc and Darja Groznik, both reporters, both newscasters on the television daily news, and both – devilish women. ... They like to dress nicely, but neither of them enjoys shopping around, or trying things on. It is interesting, however, that for evening occasions they both prefer to wear elegant mini skirts. (*Jana* magazine)

3. They say that she is cold and pretentious. Her private life is something of a mystery.

The television newscasters circulate between fashion competitions, openings and parties (*The Slovene Woman of the Year Contest*, *On the Sunny Side of the Alps*, *Fashion Jana Selects the Best-dressed Man in Slovenia*; *Fashion Thoughts of the Best-dressed Men and Women in Slovenia*, etc.), and mix with celebrities from other spheres of the local popular culture. In fact, all tabloid stories about personalities generally deal with a single issue: might there be a personality independent of his/her public role as a newscaster? These two means of promotion (deliberate advertising, and more or less unorchestrated promotion in the popular media) are inseparable and complementary. A modern newscaster of the entertainment news must be omnipresent also outside his/her own medium. In other words the newscaster - besides being present in his/her own medium, television news - circulates in numerous other media, he/she engages in additional forms of circulation. That is to say, the newscaster must live intertextually all the time, and create *meta-textual identity*. Only through permanent “secondary existence” can he/she become a *personality*, and although he/she does not attain the notorious charismatic status of celebrities, he/she nevertheless invokes trust, and can assume responsibility for the veracity of the news that he/she interprets for us. The newscasters at *POP TV* and *TV SLO*, the hosts of “talk shows” and quizzes, and local sport celebrities are but more ordinary, typical versions of the well-known star-system phenomenon.

The meanings established in this subsidiary circulation of the television personality are restored in his/her appearances as and role of television newscaster. For instance,



Matjaž Tanko is a man who takes risks, a dynamic, but also loyal and persistent man. These characteristics of the news presenter become part of his television image and characterise him as a trustworthy personality who is, however, always prepared to take risks in the search for the latest information (just like the parachuting in the videoclip advertising him and reinterpreting his trademark on the occasion of his move from public service television to *POP TV*). The construction of television news presenters as personalities is closely related to the ratings of the news. The more the news presenter is a well-known personality, and the more successful is the characterisation of his/her personality, the more successfully he/she can serve as a means for the stabilisation of an unreliable audience, and thus for the growth in ratings. The personalisation is closely connected to the ratings of the news. This means that there is an economic basis to the construction of personality, and that it is not only a cultural and textual phenomenon, but always also an economic one.

## 2.6. HAPPY CHAT

The more populist is the news, the more important is the news presenter's personality, which is achieved also by his/her directness, voicing, and confident communication with the audience. Two news presenters, a man and a woman (*POP TV*), enable the transfer from "hard news", which demand the objectified and neutral authoritative presentation of a super-professional, to soft news and less important events. The couple softens the change of discourse and the change of the role of news presenter. It is conventional that, at the end of the news, the news presenters transform themselves from the role of news presenter-professionals, authoritative omni-informed national figures, into the role of friendly individuals, into the human beings hidden behind the television personalities.

News on the opening of the exhibition of the portraits of public celebrities by a well known caricaturist Borut Pečar.

Studio: A news presenter pushes his nose upward with his hand.

Female: Matjaž, what are you doing?

Male: Oh, I would like to see what we would look like in caricature.

Female: Funny; but we are not famous enough yet, you know.

Male: But we will be some day.

Female: ok.

The “chatty communication” simulates a para-social interaction with the audience. As an author of a textbook on television production says: “When you look at the camera, you have to imagine that this is not a camera, not an inanimate object, but something alive. If you view and see the camera as an inanimate object, your eyes will be empty and your looks misty, and this will create a barrier between you and the audience.” Certainly, the manner of speaking (face-to-face interaction, chatty mannerism, storytelling, and dramatisation of utterance and face work) is closely related to the news presenter’s assumptions about the audience that he/she addresses. This can be a mass of “ordinary people” with “ordinary common sense” (in the case of populist news presenters), or informed and relatively well-educated citizens who dispose of sufficient cultural capital to be able to interpret events in their contexts.

By adding his/her chatty mannerism the news presenter counts on an “ordinary person” for whom he/she interprets events within the framework of the common sense universe:

Tastes are different, and rightly so. (*TV SLO*).

Just as though the news presenter, as a person, were speaking with the audience as an individual and this could always be tested in both directions; as if there were a reciprocity of perspectives, just as in a face-to-face communication. This pseudo-intimate language and the imitation of face-to-face communication between the news presenter and the imagined audience creates and maintains the illusion of a consensus about “the ordinary Slovene television audience”, “a unified nation”, or “a honest, ordinary Slovene”. It is the imitation of the consensus about the basic premises of society. The ideological effect of such imitated dialogue is the naturalisation of the terms in which reality is being represented. This common-sense treatment of politics presents itself as “apolitical”, although the premise that an interpretation corresponds to common sense, or that “we all share the same opinion”, is political, or ideological, for it excludes other possible interpretations of the event or issue as interpretations beyond “common sense”. The chat, together with the narration, is the main instrument of the creation of “self-evident interpretations”.

The most implicit, the least evident, as well as the most effective technique of creating the meaning by chatty mannerism, is the use of facial expression and voice. It gives

the inference of what kind of story will come next (humorous, trivial, dramatic, or tragic). In this way the news presenter can “re-code” the text, like the musical score of a film, for example, which announces the oncoming suspense, a horrific event, or a love scene. Similar rhetorical techniques include camera angle, a change of camera position, and other production techniques. In the traditional news (some time ago we conducted research into the communication dynamics of the news on the Austrian public service television – ÖRF), the facial and verbal codes are much more objectified, non-dramatic and neutral, and in principle they do not change with thematic or geographical shifts in the news. These commonplace statements –

“Now let us see what’s new in culture ...”,

“Well, let’s take a look at the world news ...”,

“This much from abroad. And the first item of domestic news ...”,

“The first in the foreign news is ...”,

“We have one more ecology story ...”,

“There is another scandal on the horizon ...”

– not only indicate a thematic or geographical shift, but *signify the change of discourse* that will be used; they mark the transfer from more important issues to those which are thus characterised as less important. They may even reveal within which referential framework an event should be understood (as “scandal”, “crisis”, or “trivia”). The differences between newscasters are significant, especially on public service television. It is true of the majority, however, that they use the following typical populist techniques to convey the news: a dramatic, or melodramatic use of voice, a narrative combination of separate news items (which gives a common meaning to separate events), chatty mannerism, and changes in the use of discourse while shifting from “more important” to “less important” spheres of reality.

Where a conversational style of discourse is used in the news, the news can also be viewed and understood as humorous, ironic, or as chat. Irony might be defined simply as an evaluation that does not correspond to the explicitly spoken. The words do not mean what they say. The audience must always discover the meaning of the irony, which lies behind the literal meaning of the text, by reading between the lines. Irony thus enables the journalist to actually *evaluate whilst still simulating factual report*. Journalists like to use irony as a hidden evaluation precisely because

of the use of objectivity as their professional ideology. Objective reporting is mixed with evaluation. Thus irony is a desirable rhetorical means, which enables the journalist to convey a value judgement without – at least not overtly – transgressing the ideal of objective reporting, as in the following case:

As of today, Slovenia is richer by one more commission. (*POP TV*)

Such rhetoric is not without effect. The main problem with the use of irony in informative journalism is its implicit statements, which replace explicit assertions, judgments and opinions. Thus a journalist can be ironic to escape from the substantiation of his/her statements, and ironic (implicit) statements also free him/her of the responsibility for these statements. The journalist does not desire an open conflict in public, and uses irony to either protect him/herself, or as a conventional rhetorical means of conveying a value message. Thus he/she avoids the responsibility for his/her own statements, since every explicit statement would need to be founded on empirical evidence. At the same time, by freeing the writer of his/her responsibility, the irony also frees the subject under consideration from responsibility for his/her deeds, or deprives him/her of the opportunity for defence.

The reciprocity of perspectives, assumed in the chat between the news presenter and the implicit viewer, must always be imitated, for it is only possible in actual *face-to-face* interaction. Therefore we cannot speak of conversation, but of an imitation of conversation. The production space of television news is actually entirely separated from the space for the reception of news. Here we are dealing with the creation of the impression of presence in virtual time and space. Since the news presenter is not among us, the impression of his/her presence must be created, imitated. Common time and space are created by a number of signs: dramatisation of voice, which points to personal enthusiasm; the exchange of looks between the two news presenters; the humorous and ironic glance at the camera, which re-codes the situation/story as a “trivia” that can be understood humorously or ironically; the use of first-name-terms with the fellow news presenter and other members of the crew

Good evening, Darja. What's new, Andreja?;

modality

The affair could have developed in favour of ...

which speaks of an individual subject behind the text;  
or linguistic acts

We ask ourselves ...;

If anybody is still wondering what is going on in the issue of the  
protection from hail, let me say ...

All this points to the fact that the news presenter speaks from the heart, for us, and sincerely – his/her inner mental life is thus in perfect accord with his/her countenance. There is a whole series of signs that speak of his/her credibility – the news presenter is a charismatic, honest, personally attractive, and fully congenial subject. This enables access to *communitas* (V. Turner) – the realm of the direct, total encounter of human identities. Honesty is the impression of unity between social and private roles, although social roles are never the same as individual identities. The person who knows everything - who is perfectly honest - is constructed, and as such maintains the cohesive cultural fiction.

## 2.7. REPORTER-DETECTIVE

The news presenter has the central role in the news since he/she appropriates and co-ordinates all the “outer voices” which construct the story. But equally important in the whole narration of the news is the role of reporter. His/her role is less and less the role of a professional newsperson, and more and more often the role of a reporter-detective who fights on the side of good in a dramatic moral battle between good and evil – as a kind of unofficial and self-appointed “dramatic ombudsman” (R. Campbell, 1994). The most obvious role of reporter-detectives is played by a number of reporters at *POP TV*.

We could not get Janez Janša, but at the Ministry of Defence they have promised us an answer tomorrow. (*POP TV*)

Our sources say ... Unofficially we have found out ... (*POP TV*)

R. P. has nevertheless succeeded in finding out ... (*TV SLO*)

According to our information, in the days that follow the police and the public prosecutor will ...

What is the connection between the latest accusations and the possible support... we could not find out, because M. P. did not want to appear in front of our cameras.

They have informed us from his cabinet by telephone ...

Nevertheless we have found out at the operational communicative centre of the Internal Affairs Administration ... (all POP TV)

A *reporter-detective* plays the central mediatory role between safety and danger, honesty and crime, individual and institution, justice and injustice. This communication satisfies the viewer's need for truth, honesty, intrigue, and secrecy. The whole style of the reporter emphasises his/her mediatory role. Thus reporters are coded as isolated individuals – heroes and fighters for justice, independent of the television institution. Their institutional identity remains hidden, their belonging to the media corporation is concealed. The power of this communicative dynamic and the construction of the reporter's role lies precisely in substituting the reporter-representative of the institution, his/her institutional identity, with the image of a lonely individual who is investigating in the name of justice, honesty, individual freedom, and democracy.

On both television programmes, the correspondents, i.e. reporters outside Ljubljana, play not so much the role of *reporter-detective*, but more often the role of a reporter whom we could call a *reporter-tourist*. The search for authenticity is significant for him/her, it is associated with the past and the tradition of the community. The reporter travels from one source to another in search of authenticity, and conveys the main narrative conflicts, such as: entrepreneurial spirit versus bureaucracy

The conflict between the management of Moravske Toplice, representing a healthy entrepreneurial spirit, and the local administration as a corrupt bureaucracy:

"The director reproaches the bluffers from the opposite side with their amassing of political power and votes before elections." (POP TV);

domestic versus foreign

The ownership of the Kobarid dairy:

"... Farmers in the Soča valley are firmly determined not to let the

fruit of their calluses pass without payment to the Croats" (*TV SLO*):

or individual against institution, nature against civilisation, and so forth. Similar to the reporter-detective, this isolated investigator is also a hero, and not a representative of an institution. The aura of heroic dramatic fighter for rights also passes to the medium – the medium itself becomes a heroic medium.

## MECHANICAL READER – SUPER-EX PERT – DEFENDER OF WISDOM

All three aspects of social news – the construction of the meta-textual identity of the news presenter as a public personality with his/her secondary life in other media; the aesthetic manipulation of the news, employing visual means to construct the leading role of news presenter in the “televised space” and in the hierarchy of voices representing the institution; and the chatty mannerism of the news presenter – contribute both to the personification and humanisation of the news presenter and to an entertaining and pleasurable social event. The purpose of this event is to provide us with enjoyment and to ritually reconstitute the “we” community. The consequence of this event is a coherent image of reality, composed of different and diverse mini-stories about mini-events, which allow a moral evaluation of the world.

In general we can say that Slovene television journalism (both on public service and commercial television channels) is closer to “entertainment” than to information. It is a simulation of authenticity rather than a “reflection of reality”; a melodramatic narration of events rather than a chronology of events and their interpretation based on arguments; communication and the informal chat of news presenters marked by corporate symbols rather than information. The entire modified dynamics of communication in the tele-tabloids borrows primarily from the conventions of traditional realistic journalism and its authoritative language, while at the same time it sources from aesthetic visual culture, melodrama, face-to-face communication, talk-shows, and advertisements. Although the news still carries information, this is of secondary importance. The audience views the news as it does other popular genres, whose main intention is not the provision of information, but rather *a moral judgement of the world based on common sense, sociability and routine confrontation with uncertainty*. In this way the news becomes part of popular culture in general, and the newsreaders become part of the pantheon of national “super-subjects”.

If on the one hand, the newsreaders are solid, honest people who “work on our behalf”, mediators and watchdogs, on the other hand they have to be constructed as capable, authoritarian, unbiased and trustworthy professionals. The expert side of the news presenter’s character



shows no emotions, it is distanced and extremely technically competent. His/her predominantly neutral language characterises the news presenter and the television institution as impartial and immediate reflection of reality. In the popular news there is always a contradiction between the news presenter's enthusiasm, engagement, "ordinariness" and typicality on the one hand, and the authority and detached neutrality of the professional super-news presenter, and the professionalism and impartial role of the institution he/she represents, on the other. And what are the consequences for public life of this ambiguous double role of the news presenter as a bearer of credibility, wisdom and confidence?

Both discourses – *conversational and neutral documentary-realistic* – coexist and interchange within a single television news broadcast. Intimacy, compassion, the friendly informal chat of an ordinary person who is one of us, his/her facial expressions, and the dramatisation in his/her voice that immediately defines the situation as sociable, meet with an impersonal linguistic code, incredible pace of presentation and interviewing, the dress codes of news presenters which imitate those of the business world, technically and aesthetically refined *mise-en-scène*, hierarchical relationships between the news presenter, or news presenters, and all the other voices in the news, which connote the totally competent professionalism, immediacy and neutrality of the news. The chatty spontaneity and informality is not left to chance; on the contrary, the conversation is fully institutionalised. The news presenters in the tele-tabloids do not chat as subjects, but rather as corporate symbols. The news presenter's chatty directness is formulaic and conventionally coded, as in melodrama - soap opera, for instance - in which no visual code is left to chance: the manner of how something is said enables the viewer immediately to understand what was said, what kind of person we are seeing, and what kind of development we can expect to evolve. The more the news, or other popular genres, is conventionally coded and predictable, the more confidence they impart.

Precisely the contrast between the engaged, chatty news presenter - a typical man/woman who can be trusted, for he/she investigates on our behalf and endeavours to establish an intimate relationship with the audience - on the one hand, and the neutral super-professional on the other, is the source of the "ideological effect" of the entertainment news. This hybrid form of the news is a new cul-

tural form, which belongs to new orders of control, or liberation. The credibility of such news is based upon the constructed charisma of the news presenter, on *the persuasive character of the speaker*. The news presenter in the populist version of the television news is “all-wise”, “a machine without subjectivity”, “a person who knows everything and imparts it to me” (M. Morse); he/she is absolutely honest, and his/her social role should be in correspondence with his/her projected, or constructed, private identity. The legitimacy, which is based on the news presenter’s charisma, presupposes an exceptional type of news presenter with pre-ordained access to the truth. The person who knows everything is constructed, of course, and thus he/she maintains the cultural fiction of traditional community. As with other populist (not popular) discourses, the populist news also conveys the general common-sense value system in a de-traditionalised world, and formulaic truths. The exceptional character of the “all-wise” news presenter is constructed in an era of methodical scepticism; his/her wisdom is constructed in an era of expertise that should always be questioned. As in the slogan of the advertisement for POP TV news:

“It’s perfectly clear: we have the answers to all the questions.”

And, on the other hand, as a news presenter on TV *Slovenia* said at the end of the news:

“And that was a reflection of today’s events.”

The choice is yours.

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