

On Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia

ŠTOLL, M.: *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*. New York, London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 279 p. ISBN 978-2013-2475-8.

Ján Višňovský

Television as a medium is a really noteworthy technological invention, which significantly influenced everyday lives of people and the whole course of society in the second half of the 20th century. Looking a few decades back to better understand the development of television broadcasting in terms of our cultural particularities, the media theorist and historian Martin Štoll reflects on the history of television and broadcasting in the former Czechoslovakia through the prism of then social organisation. His long-term research and even longer-lasting scholarly interest in television has recently resulted in the reviewed publication *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia*, with a subtitle *From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*.

Media and society form a set of mutually dependent, dynamic relationships. Media outlets, on the one hand, naturally function in certain geopolitical, cultural, economic and social environments; on the other hand, media producers use their social status to substantially influence all societal processes and affairs taking place in the public sphere. Television plays a direct role in major events by either reporting on them or deliberately distracting attention away from them. At times, it has even been an active co-creator of history. As stated by M. Štoll: *“The history of Czechoslovak Television is parallel to the history of the Central European country. Television as a medium as well as an institution, including its products, was an indisputable part of the history. Both on the conceptual level and as a real institution, it played different role. It was independent on the course of history, it was conditioned by it, but, at the same time, it directly influenced and co-created it.”*¹ We may conclude that getting to know the history of television and television broadcasting in Czechoslovakia is, without any doubts, an important probe able to outline the former state and development of Czechoslovak society, as well as specific traits of Eastern European socialism and its essential ideas that prevailed in our society for more than 40 years.

Since the book was published in English and it is also the first scholarly work of this extent, which offers the English-speaking readers an insight into the history of Czechoslovak television, the author starts by defining the specifics of socialism in relation to our country, highlighting its main aspects. The first chapter named *The Silent Majorities, Sovietization, and ‘Life within a Lie’* thus discusses the presence of the idea of socialism in Central European countries prior to 1945, as well as the process which J. Connelly calls “self-sovietisation” and the confrontations between dictatorship and consumer society: *“Doubtlessly, mass media, censorship and propaganda played their unique role in building, fortifying and maintaining ‘life within a lie’, along with the direct cooperation of the silent majorities of all the authoritarian and totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.”*²

Mapping the history of television in Czechoslovakia, the author proceeds in a chronological order and subsumes the issue in question into three main topics – ‘prelude’ titled *Television as a Concept*

1 ŠTOLL, M.: *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*. New York, London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, p. 241.

2 ŠTOLL, M.: *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*. New York, London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, p. 9.

between Democracy and Nazism, ‘the main act’ named *Television Should Serve the Communist Ideology*, and ‘coda’ called *Towards Public Service*. The book consists of 14 chapters. We strongly appreciate seven ‘contextual boxes’, which offer the reader an introduction into wider political and cultural contexts of the discussed eras; naturally, mainly in relation to television. The text also includes a rich collection of visual elements and images documenting the evolution of television as a technological means of communication, its key products and leading personas. Particularly interesting and useful parts are the list of archival sources, the register of the body of primary and secondary scholarly literature on the given issue and the list of titles of the periodical press mentioned in the texts. The index of mentioned names and television products (programmes, films) is present as well.

As the publication’s main title suggests, the author’s aim is to reflect on the development of television and its products in the context of the then social establishment. Czechoslovakia was a democratic and sovereign state during the so-called First Republic (1918 – 1938), for three years after the Second World War (1945 – 1948) and after the fall of communism (1989 – 1992). Other periods of the state’s existence were marked either by ambiguous relationship to Nazi Germany (1939 – 1945) or by dictatorship represented by the Soviet Union (1948 – 1989). Those unpleasant historical circumstances influenced television as a whole, as well as the contents that were offered to the television audiences. However, we may follow M. Štoll’s line of thought and look at the history of Czechoslovak television a bit differently, on basis of 5 stages: a) the creation of the concept of television (before it was founded), b) the steps leading to the beginning of broadcasting, and then actual broadcasting until 1961, c) television’s socially critical role in the 1960s until the arrival of Jan Zelenka in 1969, d) its role of an ideological tool in the period of Normalisation and e) its search for a role in democracy until the break-up of Czechoslovakia, which led to its demise.³ This approach allows the author to examine the development of Czechoslovak television continually, but still in the light of crucial social events such as the Soviet Occupation in 1968 or the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

The scholarly publication *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia*, subtitled *From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*, may be considered as outstanding for several different reasons. It is clearly a sociological study on the history of television in association with simultaneously emerging political processes. However, the author does not omit Czechoslovak television’s technological development and the ways it used any possible means to efficiently communicate with its recipients. The reviewed book is particularly valuable for Anglo-Saxon readers, who are able to encounter such a complex academic view of Czechoslovak television and its history for the first time ever. We do not doubt that the text will also be appreciated by all readers that are interested in the development of television as a medium; regardless of whether they are media theorists, media professionals or other people who would like to know more about the topics in question.

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3 ŠTOLL, M.: *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*. New York, London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, p. 241.



How to Write Advertising Text?

UNTERMÜLLER V.: COPYWRITING MANUAL – How to Learn to Write for Advertising and Marketing over the Weekend and Win in Everyday Battles for Attention and Wallets. Prague: Grada Publishing, 2019. 126 p. ISBN 978-80-271-2585-2.

Dušan Pavlů

It is not by accident that we decided to publish this review under the identical title of the book by Zdeněk Krížek and Ivan Crha published by Grada Publishing some time ago. In 2019, this house publishes a book with a similar content – COPYWRITING MANUAL, by Vojtěch Untermüller, an active and successful copywriter, whose work is fittingly described by one of his professional colleagues on the book cover: “*It is like a Swiss knife for copywriters – containing a tool proven over years for any case of use.*”

The book’s scope is clearly defined – it is a practical guide with a subtitle *How to Learn to Write for Advertising and Marketing over the Weekend and Win in Everyday Battles for Attention and Wallets*. The publication includes three chapters, 107 pages of text, and a short list of references. The author’s philosophy comes out of the key starting point on page 15: “*Contrary to many creators, I have never understood advertising as art but as ability and professional duty to help clients persuade and sell – anything that is needed... (...) Doing my work, I place the customer to the centre of attention and not my reputation as a creator. It means I write and think for my outputs to achieve the results set out.*”

Before you start writing – the name of the first chapter indicates that the author-copywriter needs at first to think carefully about the client’s brief in terms of the target group and its motivation, clarify the fact how specifically the offered product can help it. Doing so, they come out of the PPOO formula – i.e. wishes, needs, expectations and concerns. The strategy of dealing with the client, which has a profound impact on creativity of copywriters, is based on everyday practice. The next chapter defines the key components of a promotional – selling text – and comes out of some psychological given facts related to the objective and the target group, the product and the medium to be used, which together essentially influence the character of communication. We could say that this chapter functions as methodology of copywriting, one part of work of the entire team of creative marketers. It describes the thoughts of the end receiver in their perception of a promotional text and on their background presents the key core stones of advertising – selling text. There are many examples, particularly, concerning the possible attention of the reader, forms of their engagement, tactics to attract attention. Headline, sub-headline, subject of e-mail, title, key words – the tools to use to catch attention if well chosen. Then formulations about information to present the useful values of the offered product – that is, the attributes to satisfy a certain human need. All of that heading towards the final effect – call-to-action, i.e. to buy.

The last chapter is focused on the strategy of making a dialogue with the customer through the text. Just a few words are enough to get an idea about its content: dramatization, personalisation, and slang, and storytelling, rational and emotional arguments for shopping, writing in the view of the customer, tone of voice. Dozens of examples, informal language of explanation (sometimes, perhaps, too informal), a lot of personal, practical experience – all of that undoubtedly making such publication a very valuable guide for all who want to become successful copywriters.

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Viliam Ján Gruska (1936 – 2019)

Ladislav Volko

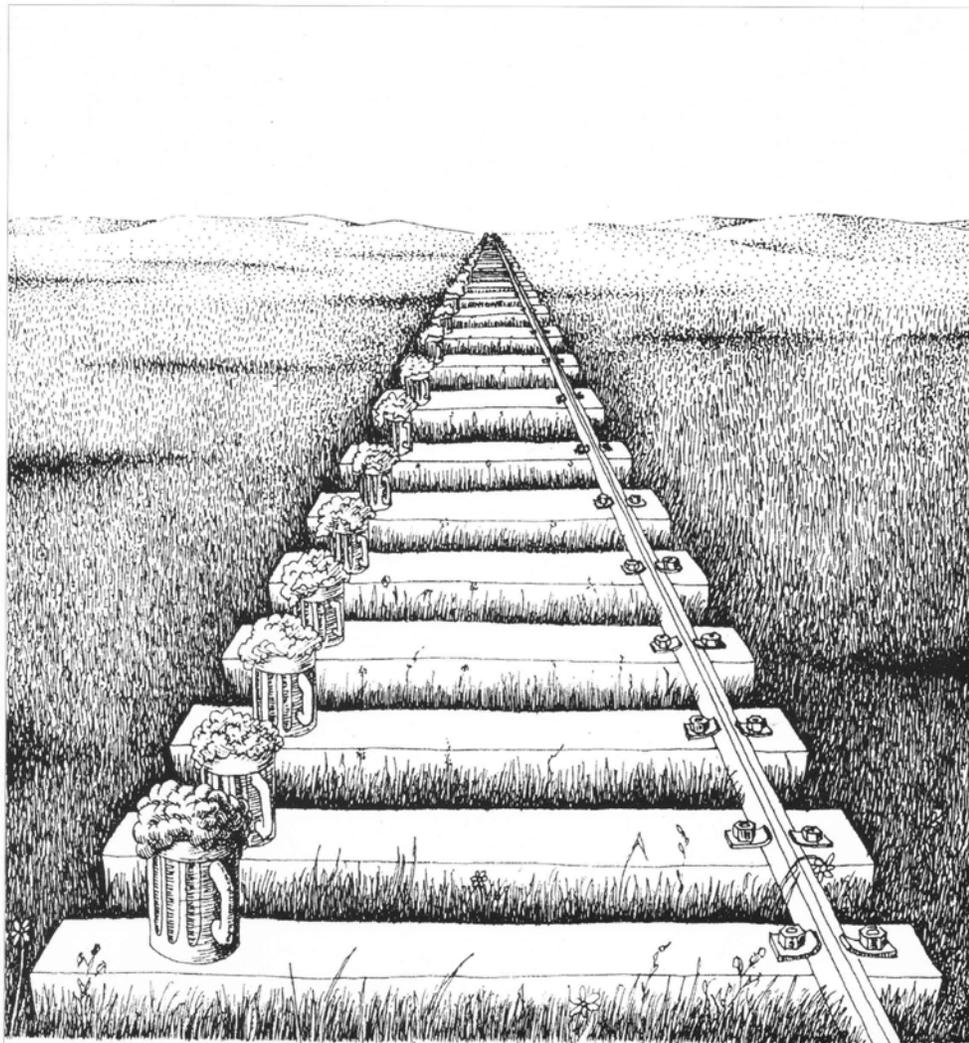
It is not easy to write about a man you did not meet so often; however, each time you saw him left you with many intense impulses and inspirations to think about. A person of renaissance; a film architect and production designer, a social anthropologist, a screenwriter and director, a teacher. Once a dancer and choreographer affiliated with the Slovak national folklore ballet *Lúčnica*. A man possessing a wide spectrum of skills and interests, who could see humankind and the order of things within the broadest contexts and used this knowledge in all his artistic projects. He was thoroughgoing, hardworking in each sphere of his activities, able to create messages with unforgettable values. “*Gruska is an architect looking for an adequate social situation. Normally, architects do not do that,*” Stanislav Párnický said about him. That is why films and *mise en scènes* he co-created were authentic, often full of symbolism. And there were a lot of them.

We have to mention at least some of his many professional accomplishments, which still deeply resonate within the hearts and minds of audiences and critics alike – *Perinbaba* (1985, directed by Juraj Jakubisko), *Kára plná bolesti* (1985, directed by Stanislav Párnický), *Chodník cez Dunaj* (1989, directed by Slávo Luther) or *Sokoliar Tomáš* (2000, directed by Václav Vorlíček). “*The revivalist of the authentic Slovak spirit and culture, (...) the man, through whose work I felt the Slovak character in its deepest essence. This essence is autonomous, spiritual and strangely pathetic, deeply rooted within the ordinary people living in the area Viliam explored personally,*” wrote the Czech publicist Jiří Plocek. Gruska knew Slovakia thoroughly; he literally travelled criss-cross the land. “*Just wander, boy, and the ones you will speak to, anywhere you will be, greet them in my name,*” claims the poem *Očarováný pútnik*, which was written by the exceptional Slovak poet Milan Rúfus and dedicated to Viliam Ján Gruska. Gruska knew a lot of common people living in rural settlements, villages or towns and cities of Slovakia. These people were his inspiration and he was a person who understood them. He initiated establishment of many folklore ensembles and festivals, inspiring lots of aspiring folklore artists. He created several festival amphitheatres himself.

Probably the most renowned are his amphitheatres in Detva and Východná, where he organised exceptionally authentic cultural performances. We cannot forget the artistic performance *Ludia z rodu Rómov* (1986), which took place in Východná and featured appearances of more than 400 Roma people from all parts of Czechoslovakia, along with their carriages, horses, work tools and festive customs. Gruska thoroughly prepared for his public performances, seeing field research as a basis of all activities he participated in. He knew the names of all people taking part in his research inquiries. He was the author of several documentaries, including the film *Rodostrom slovenčiny* (1988), an audiovisual mosaic created from developmental and vernacular versions of the Slovak language, folk music and songs, which was dedicated to Anton Bernolák on the occasion of the 225th anniversary of his birth. *Rodišská a doliny* (2013), another movie he helped to produce, is an autobiographic storytelling originating from Gruska’s research, memories and debates with wandering glaziers living beyond the Choč Mountains. Viliam J. Gruska also created several publications, autobiographic profiles and traveling exhibitions about exceptional Slovaks such as the politician, diplomat, astronomer, aviator and French general Milan Rastislav Štefánik, the philosopher Ladislav Hanus, the writer Milo Urban, the dancer and choreographer of folk dances Jozef Majerčík, the poet and essayist Milan Rúfus or the folk artist Bronislava Kubánková.

Today

The wide diapason of Viliam Ján Gruska's work enriched Slovak culture by the honesty of a creative act and by the will and desire to draw inspiration from common people, history, tradition, as well as from the most current presence. Thanks to him we know how to separate the superficial glossing from the essence, how to return to the values proven by time. *"In the era, for which Slovak linguistics has already prepared dozens of vocabularies of different scopes and purposes, a contagious mould of deformation attacks (not only) the spoken word, and it is strengthened by the negative influence of media and the Internet: this deformation includes chaotic quickening of diction, heightened intonation applied to ends of all sentences, rude illiteracy presented in television debates and parliamentary discussions, as well as in television shows. Media professionals, even though armed by assistive technologies, just create chaotic sequences of sentences; their beginnings consist of expressions, notes, unfinished questions, which results in a burl of words and interjections, and that burl is becoming standard mostly for the youngest generation. However, poetry, the princess of every language, which has been pushed far away from the centre of the media interest, which our greatest minds could once use to reflect on the most important topics related to humankind and humanity, is fading away or dying,"* wrote Gruska, warning us of the madness of the present times. And that is why anything he did in all his professions was done honestly, with respect towards work and the timeless truths and messages he spread.



Today Caricaturist

Laco Torma

*1953

Ladislav Volko

There is no man. There are only results of their deeds; the absurd grotesque dialectics, the dead or slowly dying nature. Railroads, a clever human invention, no longer carry a whiffing locomotive and wagons or the fastest high-speed train, becoming *"a symbol of a wasted idyll, nostalgia and hopelessness,"* as noted by Kornel Földvári. And tunnels, which belong to the railways, now fulfil the role of a labyrinth; the paired rails heading towards tunnels often diverge, each going its own way, crossing one another's direction or colliding, as if to say that there is, in fact, no road to follow. And yet, what a human being wouldn't do to sit on the lap in the lap of the nature and to become one with the nature; whatever the cost may be. For instance, it may be necessary to cut down all trees, manufacture a sofa or carve a table before we are able to sit down and meditate upon the beauty of the nature we remember from the past. Laco Torma's is absolutely up-to-date; it has been for quite some time. He provokes, rattles up, using paradoxes and hyperbolised imagery. Is he building a world of tomorrow scrupulously? Well, God save us. Torma makes fun of himself as much as he makes fun of us all; we would like to laugh at his creations, but there is still a certain cramp we cannot get rid of. We search for a human being without wanting to see one, but we feel that man is here, or least was here and caused all these problems. A flash of levity, so originally expressed by all Torma's caricatures, influences all our internal organs; not only the eyes and the minds but also our stomachs and guts. Have we really gone so far? *"It may be said that God uses caricatures to wink at us, merrily and conspiratorially at the same time."* (Pavel Vilikovsky). May He be able to continue in His winking.

