

An academic study of research literature on Czech television: The dawn of taking TV seriously

Jana Jedličková

Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic

Jakub Korda

Palacky University Olomouc, Czech Republic

Petr Szczepanik 

Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

Critical Studies in Television:

The International Journal of

Television Studies

2020, Vol. 15(4) 409–423

© The Author(s) 2020

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/1749602020948185

journals.sagepub.com/home/cst



Abstract

In 2017 the first television studies university programme in the Czech Republic was officially opened at Palacký University in Olomouc. However, television has been a focus of Czech academics and television and film reviewers and practitioners for a long time. This review aims to introduce various forms of academic thinking about Czech and Czechoslovak television, published both in Czech and English. It distinguishes four academic and one insider position, based on institutional and disciplinary criteria. Additionally, the article points towards possible issues with trying to reflect on and teach television in a small, post-socialist East-Central European country where there is a limited number of original scholarly books, theoretical initiatives and translations of important texts from the field of TV studies. At the same time, the small size of the TV market, language barriers and the post-socialist heritage inform the local academic debate with specific research questions that have the potential of opening new perspectives on issues such as ideology, political power, mediated memory and globalisation.

Corresponding author:

Petr Szczepanik, Charles University in Prague, Film Studies Department, nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, Prague 11638, Czech Republic.

Email: Petr.Szczepanik@ff.cuni.cz

Keywords

Czech television, Czechoslovak television, post-socialism, Central and Eastern Europe, small media markets

Introduction

The review article of research literature on Czech TV first requires an examination of the origins of television studies in the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia), where we address early developments of popular, professional and academic writing about television as well as the beginnings of TV broadcasting itself. It is not too surprising that there are relatively few works on television from the beginning, back in the mid-1950s, when state Czechoslovak television started broadcasting regularly (Štoll, 2011). Those early papers, news articles and reviews of early TV broadcasting that do exist did not study television from a critical distance, as today's television studies do, but rather engaged directly in struggles for its shape and emancipation as a cultural practice and institution. Needless to say, they represent an essential source of materials, not only for understanding the forms and language of this new medium, but also because they described and shaped the position of television within a social and, more importantly, political context. As Martin Štoll (2011) indicates, in the beginning television was viewed as a new, exciting technology full of unknown possibilities. In its early days, it was understood as a scientific project that was not to be limited by the technological options actually or theoretically available nor subjected to the propaganda objectives of the state-socialist regime. In fact, television started to be employed as a tool for spreading Communist ideology in Czechoslovak society only at the end of the 1950s, when the party-state finally noticed its deeper political potential.

Czechoslovak television was established and run by the state and hence was openly and directly dependent on the current political power relations within the country. Yet, it took the party-state over a decade (1964) before it formally subjected the new medium to the Czechoslovak Communist Party's propaganda apparatus and the direct government supervision which gave it a legal status similar to a ministry (Štoll, 2018: 168). The 1950s and early 1960s were marked by a climate of indeterminacy in which the medium had yet to find its social, political and cultural identity among other media and institutions. It is therefore of little surprise that most of the writing about television at that time was normative and prescriptive; it concentrated on television's supposed specificity and either its propaganda or its artistic potential as perceived by broadcasting professionals. For example, a vice-president of the Czechoslovak state television for programming published a book in 1964 that stressed the role of broadcasting as the most efficient educational instrument in the Communist Party's ideological struggle, distinguishing it from its Western counterparts on the basis of its entirely non-commercial mandate (Feldstein, 1964). Specialised theoretical and technical reflections appeared in two internal periodicals published by state television; critiques of TV programmes proliferated across a range of cultural journals aimed at broader readership; and new

programming trends were showcased from 1964 in the first international television festival of the Soviet Bloc, called Golden Prague (Štoll, 2018: 165).

In the second half of the 1960s, under the management of the reformist communist Jiří Pelikán, Czechoslovak television gradually turned into a new public forum for lively participatory debate. Innovative formats allowed state television to become a true 'political stage' as termed by Paulina Bren (2010: 20–25) in her cultural history of how Czechoslovak television mediated everyday life under Communism. These formats, some of them featuring randomly chosen participants and thus preventing pre-arranged statements, included polemical discussions, live interviews with public figures, as well as critical analysis of the current state of the economy, education, or even the crimes of the Stalinist era. However, following the occupation of the country by the Warsaw Pact armies in the summer of 1968 and then right up to the autumn of 1989, during the period of so-called 'Normalisation' (the neo-Stalinist consolidation of power), television played a crucial, albeit very different role: the role of the socialist TV pop culture, promoting private citizenship instead of public political debate. Detective or family-oriented serials and other entertainment genres were of crucial importance to this strategy of escapism (Bren, 2010). Apart from that, however, numerous serials for children and young adults from the 1970s and 1980s, some of them co-productions with West European companies and successfully distributed in the West, achieved solid artistic standards and originality in terms of constructing playful fantasy worlds interacting with everyday reality (e.g. *Arabela*, 1980; *Mr. Tau*, 1971–1978; *The Visitors*, 1983).

Although television studies was not recognised as an academic discipline in the country until recently, there had nevertheless been publications since the mid-1960s which focused on key features of the medium as well as on its possible psychological effects and its audiences. Some were written as political manifestos claiming the importance of the medium for 'educating' masses, others as handbooks aimed at film and TV professionals or students of the Prague Film Academy (FAMU) which started introducing television-related subjects in the late 1950s and even changed its name to the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in 1959/1960. In the 1960s, there was a particular emphasis on TV technology, genres, communicative functions and aesthetics vis-à-vis cinema, such as in the writings of the structuralist film theorist and teacher of film editing Jan Kučera, whose first book about television had appeared as early as 1940 (see Kučera, 1964). In the 1970s and 1980s, publications about the aesthetic promises or emancipatory and educational functions of television gave way to more technical, organisational or commemorative publications, including the three-volume *Television Encyclopaedia* (Tesár, 1978). Rather than forming a linear genealogy of an academic discipline, those writings can be perceived as practical articulations of top-down cultural policy, as a reflection of the professional community working under the political supervision of the party-state, or – at the same time – as discursive constructions of the new medium searching for its identity and space between state propaganda, journalism and narrative art. As such, they deserve to be closely studied as an integral part of the medium's history at the semi-periphery of the former Soviet bloc.

Yet, years after the end of the state-socialist regime in 1989, the transformation of the Czechoslovak Television into a public service institution in 1992 and the launch of the

first commercial channel in 1994, television studies still occupy a highly uncertain position among other disciplines and fields of social sciences and humanities as we will now outline.

Media and communication studies: Ideology, globalisation, and audiences

It is not a coincidence that most of the academic publications produced on the topic of Czech television, especially those in English, were published under the umbrella of media or communication studies. Most of them research the social and political contexts in which the medium operates or the audiences with whom TV communicates (and study how the communication takes place). TV news production and reception, the role of ideology in TV broadcasting, and minority representations are among the most frequent topics of this kind of research. Audience analysis is another favourite topic of media studies scholars (Baslarová, 2012; Bednařík, 2009; Macek, 2015; Reifová, 2017; Sloboda, 2013). Unsurprisingly, given the context of communication and media studies within the academic paradigm, methods of content analysis, the analysis of transnational flows in distribution and consumption patterns, discourse analysis and other sociologically oriented theories and methodologies are most common in these works.

A significant example of Czech scholars bringing local case studies into well-established international media/communication debates is the subject of transnational cultural flows and glocalisation. Václav Štětka, currently specialising in political communication and social media, studied a local version of the global format *Pop Idol* (Štětka, 2012a), while Reifová and Sloboda investigated local specificities of the Czech adaptation of the famous telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (2013). In addition, Štětka's article 'From Global to (G)local: Changing Patterns of Television Programme Flows and Audience Preferences in Central and Eastern Europe' (2012b) draws on the debate about directions of cultural flows and compares preferences for local productions versus imported programmes in the then new EU member states. There is however also an increasing body of work emerging that, although it looks at aspects that interest the international research community, are more strongly focused on how these phenomena play out in the specific national context. For example, in her latest research project, which raised a lot of attention in the local media, Reifová studied the shaming of working-class participants in reality shows for failing to comply with neoliberal ideals of the entrepreneurial self, interpreting these stigmatising acts as an articulation of class positions in post-socialist society (Reifová, 2020).

Jakub Macek is another internationally well-connected media scholar, whose research of new media audiences partly relates to television viewing. As Macek shows with the help of his key theoretical concept of 'media ensembles', today's Czech convergent audiences don't replace TV with new digital, mobile media. Rather, they disconnect media texts from media objects (devices) and pragmatically compose their personalised, heterogeneous ensembles of media practices, objects and texts adapted to their daily routines and specific social contexts (Macek, 2015). Macek's empirically based studies of Czech convergent audiences provide a corrective to the optimistic view of

convergence culture as participatory (associated with Henry Jenkins), showing that ‘engaged segments of audiences are not necessarily convergent and vice versa’ (2017: 21) and that watching linear television still forms an important part of convergent viewers’ media ensembles.

The academic home of Reifová (and formerly also Štětka), the Department of Media Studies, Charles University in Prague, is also the place where the first comprehensive history of the state-socialist television has been written. The historical account of Czech(oslovakian) television, *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia: From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*, was published in English in 2018 by the current department head Martin Štoll. As the title suggests, the main focus of the book is the interplay of social and political agencies in Czechoslovak television culture and its institutions. Štoll therefore follows the historical periodisation suggested by the political shifts of the former Czechoslovakia and breaks his historical discussion into seven basic phases. The first two ‘prelude’ segments explain the pioneering era of the ‘First Czechoslovak Republic’ from 1918 to 1938 and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939–1945). The central focus of the book, however, is television as it was under the influence of, and as it influenced, the dominant political force of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Štoll’s historical overview of Czechoslovak television, which is reviewed in Lundgren (2020), is based on the very detailed heuristic research of archival sources and offers the first of its kind insider view of a specific process of the institutionalisation of television in East-Central Europe.

Film studies’ selective approach: Genre, narrative, and fictional worlds

Film studies represent another important position from which television is approached. Unlike media studies, film studies is not usually as interested in factual forms of television, nor in its institutional histories or ideological impact, and within its perspective only certain types of television are considered worth studying. That is why most of the scholarly texts analysing television from the position of film studies reflect upon so-called ‘quality TV’ or complex television. Though most of them cover contemporary American and British TV production, recent Czech public service television productions labelled as ‘quality TV’ (e.g. costume drama *The First Republic*, 2014–2018; comedy *Most!*, 2019; retro crime series *Rédl*, 2019; or crime series *Rats*, 2020) and the local original productions of HBO Europe (such as the TV film *Burning Bush*, 2013; crime series *Wasteland*, 2016; and political thriller *The Sleepers*, 2019) are gaining academic attention as well. Genre and narrative analyses still remain the most favoured methods in this work. The use of theoretical and methodological concepts which have been developed within film studies and narratology (neo-formalist analysis and fictional worlds theory, among others) most frequently produces examples of structural textual analysis (Kokeš, 2016; Korda, 2012). In general, texts indebted to film studies usually ignore the TV industry and the specifics of producing TV programmes. As a result, television programmes are mainly analysed as a part of the film canon. This erasure of the television-ness of television in critical discourse has an equivalent in the local

audiovisual production culture; its members, especially above-the-line talent in serial production for Czech public service television, tend to speak of themselves as film professionals and to reflect on their television work in filmic terms (Szczepanik, 2018).

In the context of contemporary Czech television studies, there is an extremely limited number of theoretical books, original theoretical works and even translations of important and introductory texts from the field of television studies. This is why the recent translation of Jason Mittell's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (2015), published in 2019, was awaited as a 'ground-breaking' event by domestic television scholars and students, offering a welcome opportunity to localise and promote a specific terminology for television analysis that would supplement existing local textbooks (Korda, 2013 and 2014; Štoll, 2013). The result of such an absence has been that specific terms for considering television production systems, aesthetics, narrative mechanics and reception are not broadly used in local critical discourse, and television is still often analysed and evaluated in terms borrowed from film studies.

However, *Worlds to Be Continued: Analysing the Possibilities of Serial Narrativity* by film scholar Radomír D. Kokeš (2016) is a book that can be understood as complementary to *Complex TV*. It is arguably the only original contemporary theoretical work about television recently published in Czech. The main aim of this book is to offer a universal analytical model of serialised storytelling and the process of building worlds in television and film fiction. Kokeš's approach assumes the presence of a fictional macroworld (the complex of all features and relations in the serial) and an episodic world (the features existing in an individual episode). These features together establish the principle of seriality (the relationship between the macroworld at the end of the previous episode and the state of affairs in a macroworld at the end of the current episode). In this sense, his tool is suitable for the analysis of television serials in any state of narrative development, regardless of whether their episodic form tends towards openness or self-sufficiency. Kokeš's writing is highly original and (although mostly not yet translated) relevant to a non-Czech readership interested in theoretical debates about serial narrativity, fictional worlds and serial fiction poetics.

The central platform of Czech television criticism is the semi-academic journal *Cinepur*, which has been focusing in part on issues of television and the moving image (including video art and games) since the 2000s. The typical readership of this journal is made up of film studies students, festival film audiences and viewers who define their tastes as anti-mainstream. It is notable that 'quality TV' has been an apparently acceptable way to promote consideration of television in this 'cinophile' journal. The term and brand name of 'quality TV' manifests itself as a defining feature in editorial and critical practice but significantly is combined with genre. In general, the concept of genre is very influential in Czech critical thinking with regard to foreign contemporary television as evidenced by the fact that in *Cinepur*, most of the critics deal with concepts pertaining to crime, detective, teen, SF or hospital drama. This is an interesting point, because genre film and television drama are in fact generally rare concepts within the context of the Czech film and television industry (though not in academia), which indicates local critics' theoretical alignment with non-Czech production.

Crime dramas in fact have had a very popular status as entertainment on Czech public service broadcasting (PSB) and the genre's popularity is evidenced in an epidemic-like presence of crime serials in contemporary television programming. Not surprisingly, the first genre-oriented scholarly book – *Czech Television: Crime Serials and Their Genre Context (1989–2009)* (Korda, 2012) – uses crime drama as a starting point for its mapping of the historical development and shifts of particular television genres. Korda develops a broad taxonomy of crime drama, from the police procedural to law and prison drama, while focusing mainly on the typology of the main characters and structural conventions of such stories; he uses the concept of different systems of communication with ironic, mimetic and leader-centred characters applied to popular television serials by James Chesebro (1987). He also focuses on crime serials produced after the non-violent, so-called Velvet Revolution, starting in November 1989, which eventually led to the end of the Communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia (and which was also seen as an important change to the status of 'law and order' agencies in Czech society). Korda identifies local specificities of crime serials in relation to their genre patterns, construction of characters and settings and politics (We can find many similarities with other local versions of police dramas such as, for example, Italian police serials (Buonanno, 2000)).

However, Korda's approach is quite narrow and deals with the concept of genre as a textual category. It doesn't answer important questions about the crime genre in contemporary Czech television culture in the sense of a much broader understanding of the genre as a cultural category as suggested by Mittell (2004). Moreover, the real boom of contemporary crime drama started in the second decade of the 21st century, especially after the change of management in Czech PSB television in 2012. Following on from Korda's work, early career scholars Jana Jedličková and Iveta Jansová published a monograph analysing the characterisation of female police detective in Czech crime TV fiction between 2007 and 2017 (Jedličková and Jansová, 2019). It focuses on the changing definitions of contemporary crime drama as not solely a male genre (which is still the dominant approach of Czech PSB television programmers and commissioning editors though not so much of commissioning editors of commercial channels). These scholars explore crime shows with female leads and significant supporting characters, pointing towards the changing narrative strategies and nature of character representation within the genre. They especially point out the connection to Nordic Noir and melodrama as influences regarding genre and character development, and highlight specific regional differences in representations of female police detectives. Jedličková and Jansová represent the growing tendency of interdisciplinary academic work connecting film studies with cultural and media studies perspectives respectively.

Media industry studies: Online circulation and ethnographies of production cultures

A small group of institutional, cultural policy and media industry scholars, some of them with a background in film studies, contribute to media industry research which focuses on digitalisation, globalisation and European regulation. Since Netflix entered the Czech

television landscape in January 2016, several works have been published which focus on video-on-demand and internet TV, business strategies of transnational streaming services, their impacts on the local media ecosystem and European as well as national policy initiatives aimed at regulating them (Česálková, 2019; Szczepanik, 2017; Zahrádka and Szczepanik, 2019). However, at the time of writing, there is just one published book touching on the topic of streaming television in the Czech Republic – a collection of essays looking at video on demand and its regulation from the comparative perspective of small and peripheral markets (Szczepanik et al., 2020). There is a need for more detailed research into international services operating in the national market, especially Netflix and HBO, their (g)localisation strategies and impacts on local competitors, creative labour and production trends (Szczepanik, 2020b). At the same time, new opportunities for research are opening up due to a lively local scene of arthouse and documentary VOD services, several of them attempting to reach niche audiences across borders; the latest one, the Edisonline SVoD portal of the arthouse distributor Film Europe, was inspired to launch earlier than anticipated due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even more dynamic is the Czech scene of web TV or online-only video, dominated by locally successful brands such as Seznam, the Czech competitor of Google which operates several web TV channels, or the ambitious project Mall.TV (run by the second largest e-commerce firm in the market). Online-only video has been attracting many film and TV creators as well as former YouTubers; the growth of internet advertising spend promises further development of the field, even if it may be hampered by a post-pandemic crisis (for the first academic treatments of the local VOD market and the web TV production, see Szczepanik, 2017, 2020a; Vašíčková and Szczepanik, 2018).

Like Anglo-American media industry studies, this line of research increasingly tends to approach film and TV production and/or distribution practices as a single field of industry practice, with many producers and creators crossing borders between film, TV and web TV production (Szczepanik, 2018). Ethnography is occasionally used as a tool for surveying cultural institutions and their ‘production cultures’, especially in public service broadcasting (Pjajčiková and Szczepanik, 2015). The most recent example of ethnographically informed production studies is the book version of a PhD dissertation by the documentarist and TV script editor (Lucie Králová, 2021), who – inspired by the work of Georgina Born (2005) on managerialism in BBC – investigated practices, norms and rituals of approving and programming documentary films by the Czech PSB television.

This emerging body of cross-disciplinary, empirically oriented media industry research offers new opportunities for comparative work going beyond the Cold War cognitive frameworks still present in existing studies of post-socialism and political communication in East-Central European media systems. Instead of restrictively understanding current media practices in terms of a single historical change (the collapse of the Soviet Bloc) and a ‘territorial notion of space as bounded container’ (Müller, 2019: 538), it opts for more universally relevant criteria and research questions that allow for comparing globalisation, Europeanisation or digitalisation processes in small and peripheral media markets across the East-West divide.

Cultural studies: Post-socialist memory and representations of gender and sexuality

Many texts and themes we would loosely associate with TV studies are positioned inside media or film studies, or even in political and cultural history, and are limited by methodological and theoretical points of view we have discussed above. Writings with a closer link to a more mainstream tradition of TV studies and more generally cultural studies, as established in the Anglo-American academic field (see Gray and Lotz, 2012: 4), are scarce and often – characteristically for a post-socialist country – dealing with the heritage of the state-socialist production, especially TV serials from the period of the 1970s and 1980s. The most prominent television scholar studying ideology and the continuing political and cultural impact of the popular ‘Normalisation’ TV serials as well as the representation of the socialist past in post-socialist TV productions is Irena Reifová, who has consistently published in English (Reifová, 2008, 2009, 2015, 2017; Reifová, Bednařík and Dominik, 2013; Reifová and Sloboda, 2013). Reifová, methodologically positioned between media and cultural studies, stands out from the local academic milieu due to her ability to combine critical theoretical reflections of television as a popular medium, rooted in international academic debates, with well-grounded empirical work and a deep knowledge of the East-Central European, post-socialist cultural context. In her most influential studies, Reifová employs a cultural studies’ understanding of reading processes to propose a revisionist analysis of how propaganda-infused (but widely popular) TV serials of the 1970s and 1980s were actually received by period audiences in their private spaces. She focuses on non-democratic audiences’ ‘capability to read the socialist serials autonomously and generate interpretations and uses which significantly deviated from the intended propagandist meanings’ (2015: 81). In a methodologically innovative move, Reifová distinguishes between the actual historical reception and the retrospective reconstruction thereof. Assuming that ‘viewers’ memory of how they understood propagandist television in the socialist past is massively affected by the drive to re-evaluate the past in post-socialist collective memory’ (p. 80), she investigates how remembering and re-watching socialist TV serials after 1989 contributed to the formation of TV audiences’ post-socialist vernacular memory and historical sense-making. Further examples of historical research of the of state-socialist serial production which is informed by cultural studies include articles by Reifová’s colleague Petr Bednařík (2009), who has specialised in the work of the most successful serial screenwriter of the Normalisation era, Jaroslav Dietl, and by the popular culture historian Jakub Machek (2009) on the representation of an ‘ideal socialist woman’ in the iconic serial *The Counter Lady* (1977).

Another line of mainstream TV studies research, represented by younger scholars interested in contemporary popular TV culture, can be found in the work of Iva Baslarová (2012), a sociologist and gender studies scholar who has explored audiences of the Czech soap opera *Surgery in the Rose Garden* (2005–present), using ethnographic methods to find out why and how people watch soap operas in the Czech Republic. Jansová (2018) has investigated contemporary Czech fandom practices in relation to Henry Jenkins’ typology of fan activities and her work with Jedličková and Eva

Chlumská (2015) is one of the few academic publications which consider media representations of sexuality and gender. This book points towards the existence of non-heteronormative ways of representation and also explores the controversy of queer and LGBTQ+ labels as a commodity factor in TV broadcasting for young audiences. It describes how queer-baiting, regulations regarding minority representation and queer readings are used within contemporary TV production. Though a number of academic articles have been published on topics relating to TV representation of gender and sexuality (Jedličková 2013, 2017; Sloboda 2013) and the theme is popular with film and TV studies students, most such research is done in BA and MA theses.

Insider knowledge: TV histories by TV professionals

Apart from the four academic positions sketched above, there is a continuing tradition of (former) TV professionals writing textbooks and histories of the national TV production. The publications by Milan Kruml, Miloš Smetana, Daniel Růžička and Jarmila Cysařová deserve attention here as unique sources of historical professional knowledge and institutional memory. Kruml has worked as an analyst for both the commercial channel Nova and Czech PSB Television, specialising in foreign TV formats, and his book (2013) is an overview of TV programmes made by the Czechoslovak state television and its successor, Czech PSB television, contextualised by chapters on Czechoslovak politics and changing norms inside the institution. Smetana, who was a TV script editor and screenwriter, published a book on Czech serial production in the era of Normalisation, which remains one of the most valuable examples of industry-insider history of Czechoslovak television (2000). Růžička has been working in several positions at Czech PSB television, currently as a programme development manager. In his book-length production history of the most notorious Normalisation era crime serial, *Thirty Cases of Major Zeman* (1975–1980), he analysed archival materials to uncover political influences on the serial's production team (2005). Finally, Cysařová was a historian and a reviewer with an interest in socialist television in Czechoslovakia and the role of ideology and censorship in producing television programmes (1993). Her numerous studies of the history of Czechoslovak TV are constantly used as a source material in other historical research projects. Aside from its straightforward informative function, the relatively rich and diverse body of writings by TV professionals, produced both before and after 1989, has the potential for critical re-evaluation by media historians, media archaeologists and media industry scholars interested in industrial reflexivity, professional identities and the discourses shaping Czech(oslovak) television from the inside.

Establishing TV studies in the Czech Republic and its future

This summary review cannot possibly point to every Czech book or interesting article on television but we have highlighted several lines of research and exemplary publications that currently occupy the field that we can loosely describe as TV studies. As we point out above, academic writing about television has a relatively long history in the Czech

Republic. However, TV studies as a distinct field of study became available to students only in autumn 2017 as a radio and television studies programme at Palacky University Olomouc (a regional university in the eastern part of the Czech Republic). One of the issues (though not the only one) faced by Czech TV studies is a comparative lack of information about non-Anglophone TV landscapes. A number of recent publications in English cover the contemporary European TV landscapes from a mainstream TV studies perspective (see Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Paget, 2016, Bondebjerg et al., 2017 and MacFadyen, 2008) while others address the perspective of digitalisation and European media regulation (see e.g. the Nordicom's RIPE book series on public service media), or transnational histories of television behind or across the Iron Curtain (Bönker et al., 2016; Imre, 2016; Mihelj and Huxtable, 2018). However, language issues and access to TV programmes remain major obstacles across Central and Eastern Europe. In that regard, HBO Europe and Netflix are a significant help since they offer some examples of non-Anglophone programmes that have become more readily available with localisation. We need hardly mention that other TV landscapes, especially African, Asian and Latin-American ones, deserve much more attention still from (Anglophone) TV studies.

As a result of these obstacles, television studies in the Czech Republic currently pursue a limited number of topics. Scholars and critics tend to focus either on the heritage of socialist television or on trends in Anglophone series production; in particular, a number of recent writings use the notions of 'quality TV' and complex TV, often without sufficient critical scrutiny. The history of Czechoslovak TV in its full complexity remains largely undocumented (barring the exceptions noted above) and contemporary Czech TV production, it seems, is not interesting enough for Czech scholars, meaning that the shape of the Czech TV industry is yet to be properly analysed.

In sum, there are many challenges for the field of television studies in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, the development of university study programmes focused on television culture requires more translated introductory texts about television history, aesthetics, style, theory and research methodologies; on the other, the further development of critical research into Czech television requires a closer contact with international academic debates as well as cultural and industry trends, which would help disseminate the perspective and experience of East-Central European television studies. In the near future, the field of TV studies also has to broaden the spectrum of its research topics: scholars and critics have to take contemporary domestic programmes into account as well as to study contexts of non-Anglophone TV. The legitimisation of 'ordinary' factual television as a research and critical topic is also a significant challenge. Apart from treating Czech television as a separate subject of study embedded in specific political, cultural and historical contexts, cross-cultural comparative initiatives should be pursued that allow for moving beyond traditional 'territorial container thinking' (Hepp and Coudry, 2009: 33–34). For example, new comparative perspectives may be developed for studying small and peripheral television cultures or for comparing different (post-) socialist or populist nationalist media systems within and beyond Europe, while considering the increasing role of cross-border cultural flows, transnational media services and industry trends, or supranational regulatory initiatives; recent examples of such efforts include Imre et al. (2013), Mihelj and Huxtable (2018), Imre (2019), Szczepanik

et al. (2020). The more general struggle for the independence of media as well as humanities in East-Central Europe is beyond our discussion but in the Visegrád Four countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, the very existence of critical research disciplines is under strong political pressure. This will continue to affect, and must be addressed by, future TV scholarship, in the Czech Republic and beyond.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Petr Szczepanik's contribution to the review was supported by the European Regional Development Fund project 'Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World' (reg. no.: CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000734).

ORCID iD

Petr Szczepanik  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4386-0735>

References

- 30 případů majora Zemana [Thirty Cases of Major Zeman] (1975–1980). Československá televize.
- Arabela (1980). Československá televize.
- Baslarová I (2012) *Publikum soap opery Ordinance v růžové zahradě a jeho genderová vztahování se: etnografická studie*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- Bednařík P (2009) Normalizační seriály Jaroslava Dietla. In: Kopal P (ed.) *Film a dějiny*. 2, *Adolf Hitler a ti druzí – filmové obrazy zla*. Praha: Casablanca – Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, pp. 330–348.
- Bez vědomí [The Sleepers] (2019). HBO.
- Bondebjerg I, Higson A and Hjort M (eds) (2017) *Transnational European Television Drama. Production, Genres and Audiences*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bönker K, Obertreis J and Grampp S (eds) (2016) *Television Beyond and Across the Iron Curtain*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Born G (2005) *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Vintage.
- Bren P (2010) *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Buonanno M (2000) Il Maaresciallo Rocca: The Italian way to the TV police series. In: Newcomb H (ed) *Television: The Critical View*. 4th edn. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 266–281.
- Česálková L (2019) Umírněná diverzita. Český dokumentární film mezi platformami. *Iluminace* 31(2): 45–65.
- Chesebro J (1987) Communication, values, and popular television series – a four-year assessment. In: Newcomb H (ed) *Television: The Critical View*. 4th edn. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17–51.

- Chlumská E, Jansová I and Jedličková J (2015) *Boření mýtů*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého Olomouc.
- Cysařová J (1993) *Česká televizní publicistika. Svědectví šedesátých let*. Praha: Česká televize.
- Ebbrecht-Hartmann T and Paget D (eds) (2016) *Docudrama on European Television. A Selective Survey*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Feldstein V (1964) *Televize včera, dnes a zítra*. Praha: Orbis.
- Gray J and Lotz A (2012) *Television Studies*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hepp A and Couldry N (2009) What should comparative media research be comparing? Towards a transcultural approach to 'media cultures.' In: Thussu DK (ed) *Internationalizing Media Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 32–48.
- Hořící keř [Burning Bush]* (2013). HBO.
- Imre A (2016) *TV Socialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Imre A (2019) Streaming freedom in illiberal Eastern Europe. *Critical Studies in Television* 14(2): 170–186.
- Imre A, Havens T and Lustyik K (eds) (2013) *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jansová I (2018) *Kategorie fanoušek jako teoretický problém: aktivity, praktiky a kategorizace*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého Olomouc.
- Jedličková J (2013) Good gays, dead gays and the heteronormative threesome: representation of LGBT characters in Czech fictional TV series. In: Binder S, Kanawin S, Sailer S and Wagner F (eds) *How I Got Lost Six Feet Under Your Mother: Ein Serienbuch*. Vienna: Zaglossus, pp. 31–45.
- Jedličková J (2017) Contemporary trends in teen TV. *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities* 7(1): 88–99.
- Jedličková J and Jansová I (2019) *Ženské hrdinky a jejich zobrazování v českých televizních krimiseriálech*. Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého.
- Kokeš RD (2016) *Světy na pokračování: Rozbor možností seriálového vyprávění*. Praha: Akropolis.
- Korda J (2012) *České televizní krimi a jejich žánrové souvislosti (1989–2009)*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.
- Korda J (2013) *Úvod do studia televize 2 – Faktuální žánry*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.
- Králová L (2021) *Rozumět televizi*. Praha: NAMU. Forthcoming.
- Korda J (2014) *Úvod do studia televize 1*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.
- Kruml M (2013) *Televize. Televize!* Praha: Česká televize.
- Kučera J (1964) *Setkání s televizí*. Praha: Orbis.
- Lundgren L (2020) Book reviews. *Critical Studies in Television* 15(3). forthcoming.
- Macek J (2015) *Média v pohybu. K proměně současných českých publik*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- Macek J (2017) Traditional and Convergent Domestic Audiences: Towards a Typology of the Transforming Czech Viewership of Films and TV Series. *Iluminace* 29(2): 7–24.
- MacFadyen D (2008) *Russian Television Today. Prime Time Drama and Comedy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Machek J (2009) 'The Counter Lady' as a female prototype: prime time popular culture in 1970s and 1980s Czechoslovakia. *Medijska istraživanja/Media Research* 16(1): 31–52.
- Mihelj S and Huxtable S (2018) *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mittell J (2004) *Genre and Television – From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.

- Mittell J (2015) *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Most!* (2019) Česká televize. Česká televize.
- Müller M (2019) Goodbye, Postsocialism! *Europe-Asia Studies* 71(4): 533–550.
- Návštěvníci* [*The Visitors*] (1983) Československá televize. Československá televize.
- Ordinace v růžové zahradě* [*Surgery in the Rose Garden*] (2005–present) *TV Nova*. MediaPro Pictures/TV Nova.
- Pan Tau* [*Mr. Tau*] (1971–1978) Československá televize. Československá televize.
- Pjajčíková E and Szczepanik P (2015) Group writing for post-socialist television. In: Mayer V, Banks M and Conor B (eds) *Production Studies, The Sequel!: Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 105–120.
- První republika* [*The First Republic*] (2014–2018) Česká televize. Dramedy Productions/Česká televize.
- Pustina* [*Wasteland*] (2016) *HBO Europe*. HBO.
- Rédl* (2019) Česká televize. Česká televize.
- Reifová I (2008) Cult and ideology: Serial narratives in communist television. The case of the Czechoslovak television serial production of 1959–1989. In: Carpentier N, et al. (eds) *Democracy, Journalism and Technology: New Developments in an Enlarged Europe*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp. 295–307.
- Reifová I (2009) Rerunning and ‘Rewatching’ socialist TV drama serials: post-socialist Czech television audiences between commodification and reclaiming the past. *Critical Studies in Television* 4(2): 53–71.
- Reifová I (2015) Watching socialist television serials in the former Czechoslovakia: a study in the history of meaning-making. *European Journal of Communication* 30(1): 79–94.
- Reifová I (2017) The pleasure of continuity: Re-reading post-socialist nostalgia. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21(6): 587–602.
- Reifová I (2020) Shaming the working class in post-socialist Reality Television. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. DOI: 10.1177/1367549420902790.
- Reifová I and Sloboda Z (2013) Czech Ugly Katka: Global homogenization and local invention. In: Akass K and McCabe J (eds) *TV’s Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 189–205.
- Reifova I, Bednařík P and Dominik Š (2013) Between Politics and Soap: The Articulation of Ideology and Melodrama in Czechoslovak Communist Television. In: Goddard P (ed) *Popular Television in Authoritarian Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 91–106.
- Růžička D (2005) *Major Zeman – propaganda nebo krimi?* Praha: Práh.
- Sloboda Z (2013) Gay a lesbická média po roce 1989. In: Pavel H, Schindler F and Seidl J (eds) *Miluji tvory svého pohlaví: Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*. Praha: Argo, pp. 480–525.
- Smetana M (2000) *Český seriál a jeho paradoxy*. Praha: ISV.
- Štětka V (2012a) An Idol against his will? Ethnicity and cultural inclusion in the *Czech Search for a Superstar*. In: Zwaan K and de Bruin J (eds) *Adapting Idols: Authenticity, Identity and Performance in a Global Television Format*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 83–96.
- Štětka V (2012b) From global to (g)local: Changing patterns of television program flows and audience preferences in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40(3): 109–118.
- Štoll M (2011) *1. 5. 1953 Zahájení televizního vysílání. Zrození televizního národa*. Praha: Havran.
- Štoll M (2013) *Tři podoby televize*. Praha: Literární akademie.

- Štoll M (2018) *Television and Totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia: From the First Democratic Republic to the Fall of Communism*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Szczepanik P (2017) Localize or Die: Intermediaries in a Small East-Central European On-Demand Market. *Cinéma&Cie. International Film Studies Journal* 17(29): 33–49.
- Szczepanik P (2018) The post-socialist producer: The production culture of a small-nation media industry. *Critical Studies in Television* 13(2): 207–226.
- Szczepanik P (2020a) Channels and barriers of cross-border online circulation: Central and Eastern Europe as a digital periphery. In: Szczepanik P, Zahrádka P, Macek J, et al. (eds) *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*. Cham: Springer, pp. 159–180.
- Szczepanik P (2020b) HBO Europe's original programming in the era of streaming wars. In: Barra L and Scaglioni M (eds) *A European Television Fiction Renaissance: Premium Production Models and Transnational Circulation*. New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming.
- Szczepanik P, Zahrádka P, Macek J, et al. (eds) (2020) *Digital Peripheries: The Online Circulation of Audiovisual Content from the Small Market Perspective*. Cham: Springer.
- Tesár I (ed) (1978) *Televizní výkladový slovník*. Praha: ČST.
- Vašíčková D and Szczepanik P (2018) Web TV as a public service. the case of Stream.cz, the East Central European answer to YouTube. *Media Industries* 5(2): 69–91.
- Zahrádka P and Szczepanik P (2019) The white elephant in the room: implications of the Digital Single Market strategy for film and television distribution in the Czech Republic. In: Sundara Rajan M (ed) *Cambridge Handbook of Intellectual Property in Central and Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 238–258.
- Žena za pultem [The Counter Lady]* (1977) *Československá televize*. Československá televize.
- Zrádci [Rats]* (2020) *Česká televize*. Barletta/Heaven's Gate/Česká televize.

Author biographies

Jana Jedličková is an early career scholar at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at Palacky University Olomouc. Her research and teaching are mostly focused on questions concerning the representations of gender and sexuality in Czech and foreign (mostly Euro-American) TV landscapes and the specifics of contemporary TV fiction. She also researches female characters in Czech, European and US crime TV fiction and has a long-standing research interest in the topic of teen and young adult audiences as target audiences of contemporary TV fiction.

Jakub Korda is a member of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at Palacky University Olomouc. His research and teaching focus on the field of television fiction genres and, thanks to his long-lasting collaboration with the festival of science documentary films AFO, he has a special interest in the study of factual programming and television documentary.

Petr Szczepanik is an Associate Professor at Charles University, Prague. He has written books on the Czech media industries of the 1930s (*Konzervy se slovy*, 2009) and on the state-socialist production mode (*Továrna Barrandov*, 2016). Outcomes of his research project on the state-socialist producer in East-Central Europe were partly published also in *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Culture* (Palgrave, co-edited with Patrick Vonderau, 2013). In 2015, he was the main author of an industry report on practices of screenplay development for the Czech Film Fund. He is now leading the Screen Industries in Central and Eastern Europe Research Group (Charles University, a part of the EU-funded project KREAS) and researching online strategies of the Czech public service broadcaster Česká televize.