

FROM A TELEVISION PERFORMANCE TO A TELEVISION SERIES

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Since inception, television has united two major public institutions: the media and culture. At the initial stage of the history of Georgian television, the broadcasting network devoted a great deal of time to the mechanical demonstration of creative products (cinema, music, literature, theater). However, despite the meager capabilities of the material and technical base of the first television, in the very first year it created a completely new artistic genre, a television performance.

Television performance—such a name was due to three important characteristics: 1) its literary basis was the play or prose, 2) the show was in a specially constructed studio pavilion, which resembled a drama theater scene, and 3) initially, it was broadcast live, i.e. its demonstration to the audience was one-off, as in the case a dramatic performance. The development of the aesthetics of the genre was also facilitated by the fact that television performances were staged by theater directors and drama theater actors participated in them.

Over time (earlier in American and European television, and much later in our country), this genre changed and TV series based on television performance and video emerged.

The first Georgian television performance was created in 1957 by Merab Jaliashvili, the first director of Georgian TV, based on a short story by the famous Georgian novelist Niko Lortkipanidze.

The performance was played in a studio pavilion as it would have been onstage, non-stop. TV viewers watched the actors live. Almost the whole country watched the performance, where an old couple was played by famous Georgian actors Cecilia Takaishvili and Alexander Zhorzholiani. That contributed to an increase of public interest in television as a new socio-cultural institution and the formation of a new social segment, the TV audience.

The audience's interest in the first television performance was strengthened by a reality unimaginable before, theater visited the audience at home. You no longer had to go to the theater to see your favorite actors. The simultaneous nature of television coincided with the specifics of television performance. The audience was convinced that they could follow everything (including a dramatic performance) in real time without leaving their homes.

In most cases, socio-political data demands from the TV media the creation of a particular cultural product, because it knows that culture has the ability to affect not only the rational but also the emotional nature of man. When we talk about creating a public mood through a creative product, we first mean the genres of audiovisual art that relies on the art of the game. Such are cinema and theater and the television genres created on their basis: TV performance and TV series.

The emergence of TV theater in the Georgian media space coincided with the period when Georgian artists began to criticize the existing political system and the prevailing ideology either openly or covertly. Most of the Georgian television performances also sharply criticized the vicious sides of socialism (Al. Chkhaidze's *Bridge*, dir. M. Tumanishvili, 1972) and the neglect of Christian morality in the process of forming personalities (N. Dumbadze's *Law of Eternity* and *Kukaracha* [1979, 1980, dir. Temur Chkhaidze]). Moreover, Georgian TV performances had a secret regret over the loss of Georgia's independence. An attempt to revive the national identity of Georgian society was made in Temur Chkhaidze's performance *Jaqo's Disposessed* (1979) based on the novel of the same name by famous Georgian writer Mikheil Javakhishvili.

The reaction to the premiere of TV performance

gives us the right to say that this was the first precedent in the history of Georgian television when a TV product was followed by instant feedback from the audience. The audience made the first and strongest statement that it could not be indifferent to the TV product aired on television, which had already become an important part of its life, and this product was not a political or public program, not a news project, but a TV performance. The performance was followed by a televised debate with spectators and professional critics. If a rally or other means of public protest were allowed at that time, it was likely that thousands of demonstrations would have taken place after a TV performance. Viewers were outraged by episodes unacceptable to the morals of a significant part of the society of that time, where “obscene,” “erotic” scenes were publicly shown. In *Erotica*, viewers referred to Margo’s rape scene, where actress Nana Pachuashvili (Margo) had a bare knee. State TV was forced to follow the wishes of an indignant audience. A special show was made where viewers accused director Temur Chkheidze of promoting pornography.

No matter how much we assess today the attitude of the then society to a specific television product, the main thing is that a new cultural television product, a television show, gave viewers an opportunity to express their opinion, to be pleased or to be outraged, which in turn indicated television to its main social function.

TV theater, which has created dozens of interesting TV performances, existed until the end of the last century, and then the floor was given to a new genre on Georgian television, TV series.

TV series, which can be considered a kind of synthesis of art and media, was present in Georgian reality since the Soviet period. Soviet television series, originally produced only by the Central Television of the Soviet Union, were called a multi-series television feature film. By doing so, the propaganda machine of the Soviet state indicated that this feature product was a film that consisted of many series. If the production of American and European TV series was directly related to the financial profits of TV and production companies, Soviet television broadcasting of series was originally conceived as a weapon of political ideology propaganda. In addition, state-funded Soviet television did not have any advertising revenues. Television series are still used by television companies as a powerful means of political propaganda.

Although the first Georgian multi-series TV feature film, *Data Tutashkhia* (directed by G. Lortkipanidze, G. Gabiskiria, 1978), was commissioned by the Soviet Central Television, it was nothing like the series saturated with Soviet ideology and propaganda. Neither the previously made feature-length documentary *Tushi Shepherd* (directed by I. Chkheidze, 1976) shared the pathos of Soviet propaganda. The authors of the Georgian TV series and, consequently, Georgian television were not interested in the stories of communist labor or World War II heroes. Their daily interests included either the everyday life of modern, ordinary people (*Tushi Shepherd*) or classical literary works (*Data Tutashkhia*). Both series were created on the basis of Georgian television as important examples of the Georgian culture in the 1970s–1980s.

Tushi Shepherd, a typical example of artistic-documentary journalism, clearly shows how the TV media uses artistic forms to present current social problems, something previously foreign to the Georgian media space. Nevertheless, the multi-series TV feature films created at the end of the last century were considered to be samples of audiovisual spectacular culture, mainly for the Georgian audience. Hardly anyone would have imagined that after just few decades, a TV series with a mostly recreational function would acquire the features of a publicist product representing acute, social and political problems.

The modern broadcasting media has long agreed on two main functions: informing and entertaining. Such minimization of the functions of TV media has more or less affected TV series as well. But both the form and content of both news and entertainment productions, in most cases, reflect the political tastes of TV company owners. The open or covert demonstration of the political taste of television, in turn, corresponds to the socio-political field of the country in which it operates.

A series is quite an expensive product. Nevertheless, Georgian TV companies aspire to have at least one domestic production series in their broadcast network. The main order is for two types of series: one to create the political mood of the viewer and the other to relieve the dissatisfaction caused by the accumulated problems and shift the focus from the main to the insignificant, entertaining the public. In both cases, we are dealing with propaganda and can consider modern Georgian TV series as propaganda television production.

Spectacular culture uses the comedy genre for a variety of purposes. There are different classifications of comedy: satirical, realistic, eccentric, and others. The goal of eccentric comedy, unlike satire, is not to criticize the vicious sides of society, but to entertain the audience, to make them laugh and present a reality where there are no social problems, where the storyline is superficial and does not require deepening the actions of the actors.

This type of eccentric comedy was commissioned by Imedi TV to the production company Night Show Studio, which created a high-quality product, sitcoms *In the Middle of the City* (2007) and *In the Middle of the City 10 Years Later* (2017).

Laughter helps regain strength and create a hopeful mood. Georgian society, which has been waiting for a better life for many years, is negatively affected by the psycho-emotional mood, as well as the constantly tense political background, controversy, fragmentation, and TV political shows that reinforce this background. The audience definitely needs a TV product where it will forget about the constant problems of the past and will be happy to have fun, rest, sincere laughter. Severe social background is quite dangerous for the ruling political force as well. In many cases, the population begins to fight against the government when it starts to realize that life is unbearable. At such times, the broadcast media controlled by the ruling political force undertakes actions to divert the public's attention from the existing problems to an imaginary happy and cheerful existence. The method of "shifting attention" is one of the leaders in the list of propaganda laws, but shifting attention from the important to the insignificant, for a short time, has an effect even in a closed society. Relaxing public attention and having fun is longer-lasting. This is the reason why Imedi TV, which is loyal to the government, needed a so-called Funny TV series, not to distract, but to relax.

The creators of *In the Middle of the City* resorted to a method of hyperbolizing artistic persons. The audience laughed at the actions and dialogues of infantile, naive characters, in most cases devoid of thought and logic. Here we find an abundance of eccentrics, clowns and even *commedia dell'arte*.

This situational comedy completely bypassed real,

everyday problems. The naivety of the acting characters, even the mental limitations of some, aroused sympathy in the audience. Viewers loved to feel superior to the series characters. Advantages? The characters in the series were funny. Viewers love funny characters, clowns. They are entertaining.

As mentioned above, the main interest of Georgian broadcasters is focused on two types of TV shows: entertainment and social. As an alternative to entertainment for many people with unresolved problems, the television company shows reasons and ways to solve them. TV companies loyal to the political opposition are interested mainly in corruption, nepotism, violence and other misconduct of the ruling party. The most optimal and profitable television genre to create public mood was again TV series. That is why the Georgian commercial television company Rustavi-2, which was at that time in opposition to the government, ordered the social drama *Friends of My Wife* (since 2011)¹ of the production company Formula Creative.

The series did not follow a pre-created dramatic basis. The script of each series was written in accordance with the mood of society and expectations of the audience during this period, which is characteristic of this type of series. The characters and distracting situations of the series skillfully reacted to the party, political goals of the owner of the television company.

Extremely realistic, sometimes naturalistic artistic methods of language of the series, an increased scab-bard, predominant slang literally drove the audience into the series *Friends of My Wife* and thereby increased an interest of viewers to the Rustavi-2 TV channel. Even those for whom the political taste of the opposition channel was categorically unacceptable and who considered it to be a party media, in many cases were looking forward to the start of a new season of the series.

The series also brought the television company a big arrival. Almost all enterprises, large and small, were sponsors or advertisers of the series in various doses.

All social strata were represented in *Friends of My Wife*. The main participants were politicians, high-ranking government officials, influential businessmen, show business stars, criminal bosses, and the like. The series reflected reality with a mirror effect. Fabricated story,

¹ From 2019, the TV series has been aired on Formula TV

fictional characters are very similar to real ones. In parallel with the sharp satire of the government and the institutions under its protection, the series sympathized with ordinary people, showed us their daily life and hardships. Viewers who fell in love with the characters in the series often did not even realize that the broadcaster was gradually mastering its mood, which it would definitely use when needed.

The themes of human rights and social equality prevailed in American television in the 1970s. Feminist sentiments swept most of the series. The number of women who were fighting on the screen has increased, fighting for a full place in the social environment, which appeared on the Georgian TV screen almost half a century later.

The Georgian Public Broadcaster rolled out an adaptation of the Italian series *Perfect Mother* in 2019, produced by the same production company that has made the series *In the Middle of the City*. The main character of this series is the mistress of a middle-class family. A mother who is engaged only in household chores and raising children. The main pathos of the series is that Georgian society must get rid of the patriarchal way of life in order to give women more opportunities for self-realization, and this problem is solved by women themselves, most of whom consider the role of women only in caring for their husbands and children. The protagonist of *The Perfect Mother* seeks to change the stereotypes prevailing in society.

In addition to full-length series (drama), “telemedicine” also actively uses documentaries. Television companies engaged in political games often resort to political series.

Reconstruction of events and facts is often found in

political series. Staged scenes, together with the actual material, reflect political reality, create a peculiar and attractive format of audiovisual storytelling.

Naturally, most media outlets that do not like the current ratio of political forces are interested in documentary political series. So, the above-mentioned television company Rustavi-2, in parallel with art television drama, also produced documentary political series. Their main goal was a society tired of the constant struggle of political parties. Due to the passivity of the West, Russian political parties and the media took advantage of the nihilistic attitude of the population towards the democratic development of the country and launched a serious campaign to awake nostalgia for Soviet “safe” life. The purpose of the Rustavi-2 political series was to remind the Georgian audience of the consequences of the Russian occupation, the atrocities committed by the Soviet Empire and the two wars in the recent history of Georgia, which led to the loss of 20 percent of the territory. In this regard, the journalistic and documentary television films of Toma Chagelishvili (*August War, South Ossetia, Meskhetians*) are especially interesting.

In conclusion, it should be noted that, since inception in 1956, the Georgian television media, regardless of the change of ideological or political formations, which have a special influence on the media as a whole and a degree of their bias, Georgian television performances, feature films and documentaries or television shows accurately reflect reality, societal sentiments, as well as the goals of those political forces whose main goal is the struggle for power and their own well-being. All products of modern Georgian media serve this purpose.

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