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Critical Analysis of Media Violence Text on the Media Education Lessons

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Abstract

The media violence is the important problem for education. Based on of Len Masterman's media education theory of critical thinking and the methods of Umberto Eco, the author of this article selected the following significant items for the analysis of media texts: author's ideology; socio-cultural, market and political environment, the process of creating a media text, audience perceptions, structure and narrative techniques. This approach is quite corresponds to the method of media texts analysis, building on media literacy education aspects such as *media agencies*, *media / media text categories*, *media technologies*, *media languages*, *media representations* and *media audiences*, because all these concepts are directly related to the ideological, socio-cultural and structural aspects.

Keywords: media violence, screen violence, film, media, analysis, media text, media literacy education, media studies, media culture, students, Balabanov.

Introduction

The media violence is the important problem for education. As an example for this kind of critical analysis I select Alexei Balabanov's film *Cargo 200* (2007), which will allow us to address the actual problem of media violence and its impact on the audience. The story of *Cargo 200*: Soviet province in 1984, the policeman maniac kidnaps the daughter of local Secretary of the Communist Party and arranges bloody show with corpses and violence...

Materials and methods

Materials for this article: the media literacy education and media studies literature, periodical press, the media text with the violence content: Alexei Balabanov's film *Cargo 200* (2007),

Methods: based on of Len Masterman's media education theory of critical thinking (Masterman, 2005) and following the methods of Umberto Eco (Eco, 2005, p. 209), I select the following significant items for the analysis of media texts: author's ideology; socio-cultural, market and political environment, the process of creating a media text, audience perceptions, structure

and narrative techniques. I think this approach is quite corresponds to the method of media texts analysis (Bazalgette, 1995), building on media literacy education aspects such as *media agencies*, *media / media text categories*, *media technologies*, *media languages*, *media representations* and *media audiences*, because all these concepts are directly related to the ideological, socio-cultural and structural aspects.

Discussion

It is known that some scholars have pointed out inconsistencies in the approaches to the problem of media violence in the circle of psychologists, politicians, teachers and parents, as complaining about the flow of aggressive character of the entertainment industry, they forget to ask why, in fact, there is a huge market of literature, films, cartoons, computer / video games, toys with the theme of violence? Politicians and others who discussed the topic of media violence have focused only on the product, ignoring its perception by the public. Psychologists, too, ignored the appeal of violence in the entertainment field, with a focus on its effects (Goldstein, 1998a; Goldstein, 1998b, p. 1).

Recently have been a lot of discussion about the relationship between media violence and aggressive behavior of minors. Studies have confirmed that a permanent, frequent viewing aestheticized and "ordinary" violence that affects the attitude of children on their emotional bitterness, and sometimes – on their own aggressive behavior. The bitterness, indifference to human suffering, which cause media in children - it is a slow, hidden process (Cantor, 2000, p. 69).

Meanwhile, media violence is increasingly penetrating into Russian society. In spite of all the efforts of individual teachers-enthusiasts, media literacy education in schools, colleges and universities is poorly developed.

Long-term studies of J. Cantor detail classified seven possible reasons for the appeal of violence for the audience (especially - a minor):

1) the desire to experience the excitement (a media violence raises, enhances the emotional excitement. There is evidence that watching scenes of violence or threats of violence will significantly increase empathy, increases the heart rate and the pressure, even in adults. The impact of media violence on the level of emotion was reflected in experiments in during which measures heart rate and skin temperature (Cantor, 1998, p.96-98);

2) the desire to experience the virtual aggression (the effect of empathy): many media recipients like virtually participate in hostile actions. For example, in one study, "48% of students said they always sympathize with the victim, and 45% said they always empathize "bad guy". 39% of students admit that they like to watch people fight on the screen, hurt each other, etc. These data suggest that the fascination with media texts with a realistic portrayal of violence is directly related to the process of obtaining pleasure from the contemplation of these scenes, uncommon to identify with the aggressor, not the victim or positive character (Cantor, 1998, p.98-99); According to my research, a sense of aggressiveness in connection with the viewing screen violence experienced 8.4% and a sense of exasperation - 7.8% of the 450 students surveyed;

3) disregard of restrictions (the effect of *forbidden fruit*): parents often limit the access of children to media violence, causing episodes of this kind are to a certain part of minors more desirable;

4) an attempt to see violence and aggression reflecting their own experiences. In this sense, aggressive people love to watch the program, showing their characteristic behavior. Studies show that people, who in real life are aggressive, opt for more aggressive programs (Cantor, 1998, p. 102-103). This conclusion is supported by K. Tarasov's studies (Tarasov, 2002, p.154-155);

5) to study the criminal world (cognition role of violence in society and habitats of the audience); people for whom violence is an integral part of their social circle, are more interested in violence on the screen (Cantor, 1998, p.104);

6) complacency (the effect of apprehension): contact with media texts, containing scenes of violence, sometimes helping people to escape from their own fears of life and real problems, as, for example, a typical plot of the television series ends with the triumph of order and justice (Cantor, 1998, p. 105-106);

7) the effect of gender (the role of violence in the gender component of socialization). The children's audience has a gender difference in the perception of violence. When boys and girls are watching the same TV show, the first may be more prone to "effect of aggression" and

identification with the typical aggressive male character, whereas girls are increasingly suffering from fear, because identifying with the typical female character-victim (Slaby, 2002, p.316). My study was clearly stated that the male students among the active fans of screen violence twice as much as the female. Among the respondents (450 students from 7 to 17 years) boys were 21.0% of fans violence on the screen and girls – only 12.4%. These findings are confirmed by other Russian researchers (Sobkin, Glukhova, 2001, p.2; Tarasov, 2002, p. 153-154).

But in addition, the scenes of violence / aggression in media texts "psychologically prepare the person to intense emotional situations; allow to show in a symbolic form their physical activity and the ability to act in times of crisis, to carry out psychological self-regulation at the time of confusion"(Petrus, 2000).

It is clear that all of these factors in varying degrees, attracted the audience's attention to the *Cargo 200*, regardless of its artistic value (in relation to which the opinions of professional and mass audience as rigidly divided, and not on the principle of "professionals against amateurs").

Results

Author's ideology in the social and cultural context (the dominant concept are: media agency, media representation, media audiences)

The ideological message of Alexei Balabanov, the writer-director of the film *Cargo 200*, is clear: "It's just a movie about 1984, as I remember it, as I imagine it and see. I wanted to make a film about the hard end of the Soviet Union - that I did it"(quoted from the source: Nekrasov, 2007). And this film has many fans. For example, the writer, journalist, broadcaster and film critic and winner of many awards Dmitry Bykov wrote that it is "an outstanding film: perhaps most important movie of the year"(Bykov, 2007). Another film critic – Alena Solntseva echoes: "there are many associations: and our Russian incredible tolerance for evil, to the scum who live peacefully alongside; and a surprising indifference to the surrounding landscape; and a strange attachment to metaphysical disputes against the backdrop of indifference to loved ones"(1984: critics session, 2007). Even more conceptual generalizations comes from Maria Kuvshinova: "Balabanov's film is a hard and honest response to all that is happening and will happen in our country, and in general - in the world under heaven"(1984: critics session, 2007).

It would seem that we are dealing with a consolidated opinion of professionals, art historians, who, opening the "underground corridors metaphors", found in Balabanov's media text the philosophical depth and a powerful ideological, nearly "Orwellian" message to humanity.

But equally authoritative group of professionals (Kitchin, 2007; Kudryavtsev, 2007; Mathiesen, 2007; Pavluchik, 2007) analyzes *Cargo 200* from the opposite point of view, arguing, for example, that "the whole picture of life depicted, ridiculous in terms of elementary credibility, easy to fit into tight directorial concept, the essence of which - to show the agony, insanity of the Soviet system, like decaying corpses thereby (ingenuous metaphor) that are rotting in the apartment rapist-cop... This is hand made horror film, infused with social "dill", horror and sexual violence ... Characters from *Cargo 200* (ie, the population of the country in miniature) - a gathering of some freaks, degenerates, alcoholics, and criminal elements, profoundly indifferent to all people in the world"(Pavluchik, 2007).

Valery Kitchin's conclusion even tougher: "Then why is this story needed Balabanov for his version of "1984"? And it's simple: he wants to be George Orwell. The year 1984 was chosen with a clear allusion. But his talent is lean, his tasteful is bad, his fantasy is insignificant" (Kitchin, 2007).

In short, on the one hand the film of A. Balabanov treated as an extreme (and even messianic) ideological message, and on the other – as the primitive "horror", bad taste and professional level or almost parodic extravaganza "trash".

In this regard, good media literacy education way - to offer methodical approach, which essentially helps ideological analysis of media text. Students must know the basic techniques of manipulative influence of media on the audience (many of which, in my point of view, significantly visible in *Cargo 200*):

- *orchestration* - the psychological pressure in the form of constant repetition of certain facts, regardless of the truth;
- *selection* - the selection of certain trends: for example, only positive or negative, distortion, exaggeration (understatement) of these trends;
- *embellishment* of facts;

- *sticking labels* (eg, guilty, insulting, etc.);
- *transfer* - the transfer of any qualities (positive, negative) to another event (or person);
- *evidence* - a reference (not necessarily correct) to authorities in order to justify an action, or that slogan;

- *folksy game*, including, for example, the most simplified form of information presentation.

On this basis I use the following methodological procedures for the analysis of media texts in the classroom:

- *sifting of information* (for example, for media texts claiming documentary students can select true and false, make the purification of the information from the *rouge* and *shortcuts*, etc.);
- *removing information from the halo of typical, authority*;
- *critical analysis* of the objectives and interests of *agency / media text authors*.

Market conditions that have contributed to the plan, the process of creating a media text, audience's perception (the dominant aspects: media agency, category media / media texts, media technology, audience).

The question arises: why Alexei Balabanov decided to settle with the Soviet regime in 2007, while other Russian authors made about 20 years earlier (don't forget Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who wrote and published *The Gulag Archipelago* with real risk to his life in the 1960s)?

Maybe one answer is simple: the beginning of the XXI century open more possibilities for *trash* treatment of serious social and ideological issues. Most likely, the authors of *Cargo 200* previously relied on polar interpretations of their work, because the atmosphere of scandal, confrontation in the debate about the degree of plausibility, the reality and the shock of naturalism largely helps promote the product in the media market in a modern socio-cultural context.

Of course, *Cargo 200* was marginalized in ordinary Russian cinema halls: "this film collected only 300 thousand dollars for 11 days" (Matizen, 2007). More or less notable international festivals disdained to take *Cargo 200* in the competition. However, *Cargo 200* has the success in media, intended for individual viewing (video, DVD, computer discs, files). And this demand is substantially fueled "branded" advertising for *Cargo 200* ("See the shocking film from cult director of *Brother* and *Brother-2!*) and contradictory reactions from journalists, critics and the public (thanks to Internet sites, advanced part of the mass audience is almost instantly responds to any more or less significant event in politics, economy and culture).

But do not ignore the commercial potential of media violence, which has always been a great place in Balabanov's media texts. And then, I think, K. Tarasov is right: "As part of the modern film industry, focused on extracting the maximum profit, the depiction of violence is perhaps the most cost-effective elements of the film. Creating a serious and at the same time fascinating media product, affecting important concern to many questions in relation to the creative task is very complex, requiring much time and effort. The saturations of the film fights, gunfights, chases let hide a weak story and characters, the lack of any meaningful themes, etc. and attract the viewer's attention"(Tarasov, 2003, p.123).

Considering that age limit is not adhered the *practical* sale of DVD in Russia, I can assume that a large part of *Cargo 200*'s audience was minor audience, because media violence is attractive area for teenagers.

Based on the analysis of the results of the research and study of the works of Russian and foreign scientists, I developed the following typology of audience perception of media violence:

- 1) active, targeted positive perception of media violence on the level of identification with the environment, the plot and / or severe / aggressive media text characters;
- 2) passive (no explicit relationship) perception of media violence at the level of the partial identification with the environment, the plot and / or severe / aggressive media text characters;
- 3) the active, purposeful negative perception of media violence on the level of identification with the environment, the plot and / or victims of violent / aggressive media text characters;
- 4) active, purposeful negative perception of screen violence at opposition positions / actions violent / aggressive media text characters and / or the position of the creators of media text.

Turning to the citations of the articles of professional media critics and ordinary viewers comments about *Cargo 200* it is easy to see a typology of perception of media violence (the desire to experience the excitement / arousal, empathy, fear, a premonition of a happy ending, the effect of "forbidden fruit" etc.). The more common and often underestimated are two of them - the fear and indifference to scenes of violence (Kunkel, Wilson, and others, 1998, p. 155-156).

My research experience (Fedorov, 2000; 2001; 2004; 2007) also showed that most of these reasons are often seen in children's audience. The feeling of fear in relation to the display of violence is characteristic of 15.3% of pupils. However, the situation in the 7-8-year-olds pupils area is much higher - 20.0%. The feelings of indifference, apathy, caused scenes of media violence, admitted one in ten of those interviewed minors.

The American research team following the television preferences of minors in the group for 22 years. As a result, it was found that viewing violence on television is the factor by which to predict violent or aggressive behavior later in life, and it surpasses even such common factors, such as the behavior of parents, poverty (Cannon, 1995, p. 19).

I share the view of J. Goldstein, that on appeal of violence affects not only the specific situation in which the audience, but also society as a whole (Goldstein, 1998a, p. 221).

In this context, in my view, modern social and cultural situation in Russia has extreme tolerance for radical media violence. The creators of *Cargo 200*, having considered the market situation, have decided that domestic audience "is ripe" for their "radical concept" at a time when, despite the camouflage declaration, Russian media removed all the old taboos on the degree of naturalism in the portrayal of violence.

So, there are media violence's main reasons to appeal to the audience: entertainment, recreation, compensation, the desire to experience the excitement / fear; the desire to experience the virtual aggression (the effect of empathy); identification with aggressive characters or character-victim (the effect of identification), the desire of ignoring restrictions (the effect of "forbidden fruit"); attempt to see violence / aggression reflecting their own experience; studies surrounding the criminal world (cognition role of violence in society and in the habitat of the audience); the effect of complacency, ie the effect of foreboding happy ending, and the realization that "this nightmare does not happen to me"; the effect of gender, etc.).

All this fully corresponds with the basic theory of "media effects" that describe the following mechanisms of action of audiovisual works, containing scenes of violence:

- manipulation with sense of fear (for example, promoting a sense of fear of aggression and violence);
- training audiences violent / aggressive actions and their subsequent commission in real life (violence as a valid way to solve any problems);
- stimulation, agitation aggressive, imitative instincts of the audience, its appetite in relation to scenes of violence (especially in relation to the audience with mental disorders);
- "grafting" the audience's feelings of the indifference to the victims of violence, decrease the sensitivity in relation to violence in real life;
- "cathartic", a virtual and safe way for others aggressive emotions that do not lead to negative consequences in real life.

Undoubtedly, the authors of *Cargo 200* can be any number disown the fact that they deliberately counted the impact of this kind of rides media violence, but, as you know, the end result is not necessarily associated with the deliberate intent of the authors. Consciously or unconsciously, prudently and intuitively... The result is important, in this case, a media text, the main attraction of which was the "radical" and naturalistic shown violence in its various guises.

The structure and narrative techniques in the media text (the dominant aspects are: media / media texts category, "media technology, media language, media representation)

In my opinion, *Cargo 200* is built on the simple oppositions:

- 1) a ruthless maniac and his helpless victim (see folkloric roots of the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* and the *Gray Wolf*);
- 2) the indifferent State and its "citizens-cogs", which it sends to die in the war, or doomed to a miserable stagnation in appalling living conditions;
- 3) naive heroine (*Red Riding Hood*) and cunning maniac (*Grey Wolf*);
- 4) plans (plans of the daughter of the big boss - *Little Red Riding Hood*, plans of the maniac - *Grey Wolf*, the plans of Professor-atheist) and the final results, opposite of these plans.

However, this kind of oversimplification typing has the supporters (Swinarenko, 2007; Gladilshchikov, 2007, and others).

I can probably agree that the *Cargo-200* stylized under "late Soviet folk horror stories", based on which "determined here and all the rest: the schematic characters overabundance

unexamined fable turns a simple bust erased images, demonstrative hopelessness is happening" (Mantsov, 2007).

However, it is difficult to agree with the enthusiasm about the "quality" images of violence in the film about the "real" life: "we finally get is not glamorous Hollywood toy, but a tape in which the reliability, blood and sweat even more than in real life. This brilliant the corpse paratrooper who lies in bed with the bride. Which is a real high-Mighty horror! ... Who would have dared to keep the dead man for so long in the frame, with all its sickening details?" (Swinarenko, 2007).

Student audiences can offer more specifically to analyze the expression of genre stereotypes in Balabanov's film with additional questions. And it seems that this kind of analysis - an important component of the development of critical thinking and media competence in the audience.

Questions for critical (ideological, philosophical, semiotic, identification, ethical, autobiographical, iconographic, aesthetic, cultural, hermeneutic and so on.) analysis (BFI, 1990; Buckingham, 2003, pp.54-60; Semali, 2000; Silverblatt, 2001, pp.42-43; Silverblatt, 2014; Berger, 2005; Usov, 1989; Fedorov, 2004, p.43-51; Fedorov, 2006, p.175-228; Fedorov, 2007; Potter, 2014, and others.)

Media agencies:

Can the media messages contribute to the promotion of militarism and / or violence?

Who is the author of a media text?

What is the main purpose of the ideological media texts? To what extent achieved this goal?

What is the reaction of the audience expect its creators?

Can you identify the moral values that are held by the authors of a media text?

What kind of event media agency / authors seek to reflect this work in the first place, which seek to eliminate?

What, in your opinion, the assumptions creators of media text about the audience?

How would you assess the target audience of the media text?

Can the media characters depend on the thematic / genre / political, etc. focus specific media agencies? If so, how?

What is the ideology of these characters express?

Media / media text categories:

What is the difference between the fiction and documentary media texts?

Can you name the genre, which are the most common characters with aggressive behavior, immoral acts?

What types of media texts and genres promote greater identification with media characters?

What are the stereotypical scenes, plot conventions characteristic of the thriller and horror genres?

Is there a predictable formula of the genre? As understanding of this formula helps your perception of a particular media text?

What are the stereotypical scenes, conventions storylines specific to the genre / the specific media text?

Can you articulate the ties to stereotypes stereotypical genres / themes related to media violence?

As a visual codes and conventions are manifested in different types of media texts (for example, in the genres of thriller and horror)?

Is there a difference in approach to the use of color and light in the media texts of different types and genres (for example, in the genres of thriller and drama)?

Media technologies:

How different media technologies used in the development of plots of the same figure of media culture (for example, in the work of the author, the specific media text which is analyzed at the moment)?

Are the results in the media text stereotype technological solutions?

Does the stereotypical media technologies by genre media text?

Media languages:

Is there a media text in the visual symbols, signs? If so, what?

What about the facial expressions and gestures of characters associated with the genres of thriller and horror?

Media representations:

Think about the various social problems, such as crime, violence, racism, etc. How the media can exacerbate these problems or, on the contrary, contribute to their resolution?

Is there a media text in this particular world view, ideology, philosophy, political values?

What are the political, ideological, philosophical, social trends are reflected in the media text (for example, the problem of deviant behavior, sexism, conformity, anxiety, stereotyped thinking, conflict of generations, arrogance, snobbery, loneliness, etc.)?

Does the media text hidden subtexts, false information?

What are the political, social and cultural sentiments are reflected in the views and actions of the characters of the media text?

Is there any scenes of violence in the media text? If so, what is the difference between the image of violence of other famous media texts?

Are the creators of media text, to portray negative characters as the embodiment of evil?

Media audiences:

Are there any media messages aimed at the manipulation of the audience? If so, in what media texts is specifically manifested?

What is the meaning of ethics in the media culture? Does the media texts in moral evaluation? If so, how to define the criteria of morality?

Can the media texts to promote racial, class, ethnic, national or religious enmity and hatred?

Can you think of media texts that you do not want to show the children aged 7-10 years? Why is that?

To what level of audience appeal moral authors of this media text?

Why did the audience takes some stereotypical media representations as true and reject others as false?

For what reasons the audience can choose the media text?

How does the audience interprets, evaluates the ideological orientation of the media text?

What is the typology of perception and evaluation of media texts the audience?

What are the reasons for the success of mass (mass lack of success) of a particular media text at a mass audience?

What is the role of gender, social class, age and ethnic origin in the media perception of the audience (including in relation to a particular media texts)?

What abilities, skills a person needs to qualify to analyze media texts?

Conclusions

Balabanov's media text with hard media violence has the clear connection with the traditional structure of the plot, or horror thriller stereotypes:

The structure of the story thriller genre stereotypes

- Characters: civilians and maniac;
- A significant change in the lives of the characters: a maniac commits a series of murders;
- A problem: the violation of the law, the peaceful life of each character under threat;
- Find a solution: the positive character or cop pursuit of a maniac;
- Solution / return to a stable life: destruction / arrest the maniac, the return to ordinary life.

The structure of the story of horror genre

- Characters: civilians and monster;
- significant change in the lives of the characters: the monster attacks civilian people;
- A problem: the violation of peace life;
- Search for solutions: the struggle of civilians (or nominated from among the brave hero) with a monster;

- Solution / return to a stable life: the destruction of the monster, the restoration of peaceful life

And the basis of analysis of this text with media violence, in my opinion, can be based on a variety of creative tasks associated with the key concepts of media literacy education (media agencies, media categories, media language, media technologies, media representations, media audiences, etc.).

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УДК 37

Критический анализ медиатекста, содержащего сцены насилия, на медиаобразовательных занятиях

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Аннотация. Медианное насилие – важная проблема для образования. Основываясь на теории медиаобразования как способа развития критического мышления (Л. Мастерман) и аналитических методах У. Эко, автор статьи анализирует следующие существенные элементы для анализа медиатекстов: авторская идеология; социально-культурная, рыночная и политическая среда, процесс создания медиатекста, восприятие медиатекста аудиторией, структура и повествовательные приемы. Этот подход вполне соответствует методу анализа медиатекстов, принятому в медиаобразовании – с использованием таких аспектов, как медиаагентство, категории медиа, медиатехнологии, язык медиа, медиарепрезентация, медийная аудитории, потому что все эти понятия имеют непосредственное отношение к идеологическим, социально-культурным и структурным аспектам.

Ключевые слова: медийное насилие, экранное насилие, кино, медиа, анализ, медиатекст, медиаграмотность, изучение медиа, медиакультура, студенты, Балабанов.