

Jacek Dabala

*Mystery and suspense in creative righting*

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Jacek Dąbala's new book *Mystery and suspense in creative righting* is an ambitious attempt at capturing the mechanisms behind news and journalistic broadcasting. The author set himself an extremely difficult task, since we are dealing here with a subject that can be characterised by strong lability and one that easily succumbs to bias.

What is unique about this publication is the fusion of two perspectives. One of them is that of an extrinsic observer, that from a safe distance, impassively, observes and examines the professional values and errors, the second is the insider's (expert in the practical aspects of news and journalistic broadcasting) perspective, that consists of the mutual influence of the practice of television production and its objective or the value that it should embody according to this expert. It is an unusually rare case, in which we are dealing with a media expert that can move fluently between the practical details of the profession and the theoretical laws of creation in this genre. One should emphasise, that the author makes reference to the most notable TV creators and anchormen, such as Ted Koppel, Dan Rather and Mirna Pineda. As original testimonies, their opinions are of unique importance to the theory of news and journalistic broadcasting. The accounts and opinions of the originators of this genre allow us to better understand the professional and axiological mechanisms of broadcasting production. A similar value can be found in the statements of Polish journalists, whose experience is the vivid substance of the materia of broadcasting. To complement the author's theoretical thought, examples of specific TV programmes and issues connected with their realisation, have been used. The passage from an issue related to the realisation of

a specific programme to theoretical speculations is achieved through the use of bottom – up hermeneutics, a method that allows a deep analysis of both the practical and the theoretical.

Jacek Dąbala's book does not exhaust the issue, but concentrates on particularly important aspects of production of live broadcasting, which are primordial to the quality and success of journalistic and news broadcasting. One of the most important issues, decisive for matters of quality is broadcasting dramaturgy. The author dedicated a number of chapters of his book to the profound analysis of methods of capturing the audience's attention, as well as the limitations of perception. The ability of building suspense and creative writing accomplishments are another important subject for the author, who believes them to be the most important professional skills, that play a decisive role in creating good quality news and journalistic broadcasting. He analyses in detail the threats to such values, as mystery, that is the guarantee of capturing the audience's attention and the problem of choosing the proper standards of news broadcasting, such as infotainment, that can have a negative effect on the credibility and trust on the side of the audience, or the problem of boredom, originating from banal dramaturgy and an unattractive, foreseeable message, devoid of inner suspense, mystery and a kind of play between the different elements of the message.

The chapter on the subject of risk of error, will prove of great use to all practitioners of news and journalistic broadcasting. The awareness of the threats related to the form of the programme and its realisation is invaluable to all broadcasting publishers, editors and anchormen. Moreover, the examples being analysed

by the author allow those without prior practical experience in broadcasting to acquire valuable theoretical knowledge and to get acquainted with the unique experience of broadcasting producers.

The educational value can also be found in fragments that display the mutual influence of language and image in broadcasting. This is a valuable compendium of practical advice to be used when writing and editing film material as present in news and journalistic broadcasting. The mutual influence of sound and image is one of the basic and most difficult issues in professional television production. The search for balance and the conscious use of the overlapping or the withstanding of these two factors, is the touchstone of the professional abilities of broadcasting creators.

Journalistic and news broadcasting are the professional and axiological genres that most easily succumb to format changes. Jacek Dąbala's book allows the analysis and acquaintance of the period of transition in broadcasting, that was the transformation of the Polish People's Republic's *Dziennik Telewizyjny* (Television Journal) to *Wiadomości* (News). Here the psychological perspective of the audience of news' programmes proved primordial. Society's expectations and audience's habits, that the viewers educated by *Dziennik Telewizyjny* had, strongly influenced the form of *Wiadomości* in the beginning of the existence of this programme.

The author takes notice of the role that, apart from professional skills, the creativity of journalists and producers plays. Creativity – especially in conditions of strong competition for trust and attention of the viewer – is one of the most important factors influencing modern broadcasting forms. What is unique for the Polish market is the analysis of the anchoring techniques. The author deconstructs the elements of this field. Public opinion polls show how important the role of the anchorman is in the formation of broadcasting formats, as well as in

influencing common views in society. In Jacek Dąbala's book one will find the analysis of elements such as the appearance, body language and TV personality. All of these influence the anchorman's credibility. It is fascinating, how sometimes they can build the image of the anchorman in the most unexpected and unusual ways.

The second part of the book deals with the art of presenting and can be treated as a manual and a sort of professional guidebook adequate as well for people with rich broadcasting experience. This is true especially since one of the elements of the analysis is the "closure" of anchormen on set to criticism and the psychologically legitimised reluctance to self-improvement. The complete set of presentation skills and the most important TV personality qualities decide whether a given person is able to connect with the audience and whether this interaction can be optimal. Certain traits and professional errors can be the reason behind the breaking off of this delicate relationship between anchorman and viewer, that has such an influence over the success of a given TV persona, as well as his/her programme, and even on the success of the entire broadcasting station. TV personalities form the attitude of viewers to all of their productions and to the TV stations themselves, considered a trademark. A detailed analysis led by Jacek Dąbala can prove to be highly useful to people working with the image of TV stations. News and journalistic programmes play a decisive role in the viewers' perception of specific broadcasting trademarks. A specific kind of *eclat* and the reliability of journalism have an effect on the indexes of viewership of the entire programme offer of the station. Currently, it is the main news programmes that gather in front of the television the biggest and most loyal audiences. They only give way to the most exciting sport spectacles or to the so called film blockbusters of programming. Even so, their most important advantage over any other type of TV

production is that they will attract millions of viewers on a daily basis. Once again, this only makes Jacek Dąbała's publication more important. It is inspiring both for media experts and journalists or other broadcasting professionals. The publication is a kind of a mirror, that should be often used when creating news' and journalistic broadcasting programmes. It is well worth mentioning that the book can prove itself useful for journalism students, as well as media or social communications, it is simply an obligatory and indispensable read.

The book published in Polish and English has a universal character and deals with the analysis of both Polish and foreign programmes. It has a chance of becoming an important publication also outside of Poland. The original perspective of the Polish researcher on a matter is apprehensive and demanding everywhere, despite the language and media cultures involved. The issues being analysed by Jacek Dąbała are timeless and true in every broadcasting station.

*Jarosław Gugala*