

Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci

Filozofická fakulta

Bakalářská práce

Historical changes in the concept of television flow

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Studijní program: Divadelní věda – Filmová věda

Olomouc 2014

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma *Historické proměny konceptu televizního toku* vypracovala samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále prohlašuji, že tato bakalářská práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Ráda bych touto cestou vyjádřila poděkování Mgr.Jakubovi Kordě Ph.D. za jeho cenné rady a trpělivost při vedení mé bakalářské práce. Jsem vděčná za vstřícnost a pomoc při získání potřebných informací a podkladů.

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podpis

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NÁZEV:

Historické proměny konceptu televizního toku

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ABSTRAKT:

Cílem této práce je definování televizního toku a sledování jeho vývoje v průběhu času. Primárním cílem je provést rešerši a zkoumat teorie zabývajícími se televizním tokem na základě prací mediálních odborníků, filmových historiků a kritiků jako jsou například Raymond Williams, John Ellis, Rick Altman, Jane Feuer, Klaus Bruhn Jensen a další. Postupem času se televizní tok díky technologickému pokroku a digitalizaci proměňoval. Proto jsem ve své práci mapovala hlavní přístupy k televiznímu toku chronologicky podle desetiletí. Druhým cílem práce je definovat televizní tok jako takový v rámci televizního průmyslu. Metody, které jsem použila, jsou historické, porovnávací, analytické a kritické zhodnocení teorii a hypotéz. Ve snaze prozkoumat pojem televizního toku jsem zmínila hlavní myšlenky každého z autorů. Kriticky jsem jejich práci zhodnotila, a srovnala, v čem se jejich pohledy na danou problematiku shodují nebo liší. Na závěr jsem se pokusila odhalit podstatu a roli televizního toku v moderní televizní kultuře.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

Televizní tok, plánování, fragmentace, digitalizace

TITLE:

Historical changes in the concept of the television flow

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ABSTRACT:

The subject of this research is the definition of TV flow notion and its gradual changes with the consequences of time. The primary goal of this research is the analysis of the TV flow notion as a distinct phenomenon basing on the theories of media scholars, film historians and critics such as Raymond Williams, John Ellis, Rick Altman, Jane Feuer, Klaus Bruhn Jensen and others. New historical changes were appearing due to the processes of technological improvement and digitalization. That's why I've explored the main approaches to TV flow chronologically according to decades. The secondary goal of my research is concentrated on the definition of the term flow itself within the framework of television functioning. Methods which I have used in my work are historical method, comparative method, analysis and critical evaluation of theories and hypotheses. In order to explore the nature of TV flow notion I've mentioned the main aspects of the flow theories from each academic. I gave them my critical evaluation and made a conclusion concerning the aspects in which these scholars argue, agree or disagree between each other. Finally, I have made an attempt to reveal the essence and a place of TV flow in modern television culture.

KEYWORDS:

Television flow, scheduling, segmentation, digitalization

INTRODUCTION

In this work I had made an attempt to explore a particular aspect of television, namely television flow, its definition and significant place in the television's theory and technology.

The relevance of the topic I have chosen – television flow currently finds itself in an intensely formative phase. Nowadays media and television schools all over Europe, US and UK are discovering this rather young topic of interest – television flow. Struggling to reveal the essence of this new concept in TV studies, scholarships, theorists, professors and students related to this field of knowledge now work with an unrewarding task: the task of finding principles for unification of the all possible ways and definitions to produce the meaning, namely television flow.

This topic of interest includes analysis of theoretical and ideological synthesis among television systems. Nowadays television plays many integral roles in mankind's civilization. For example the informative role, the role of propaganda, the role of relationship balance between education and entertainment or efforts to foster nation-building or the formation of regional or transnational identities through television. Other useful features of television are program exchange, broadcast signal-sharing across borders, spreading of general television genres such as soap opera, news or commercials, the psychological influence on the audience. All these factors have contributed to the role which television occupies in our lives. All these subjects of studying are the links of one big chain called television flow: *"Flow has become something of a totem in television theory internationally"*¹. Contributions that focus on how to study and understand the history and methods of the global television flow are particularly welcome nowadays, because it is a huge part of television itself. That's why I am deeply interested in the mechanism and functioning of the television flow.

The primary goal of this research is to analyze the notion of television flow as a distinct phenomenon. Flow is conceptualized by media scholars, film historians and critics. All the theories of academics, which I have chosen to analyze in my

¹CORNER, John, *Critical ideas in television studies*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, p.60, ISBN 0-19-874221-5

research, are in some way interrelated. They either mutually complement each other, or refer and quote each other. In some cases academics don't agree and argue between themselves concerning the scientific matter of their common dispute. In order to explore the nature of TV flow notion I've mentioned the main aspects of the flow theories from each academic. As far as my topic of interest is rather young (media scholars began to operate with the term TV flow approximately in 1980's) the fact, that the approaches of these scholars are unknown to each other is impossible. All the theories, which are mentioned in my research, operate together and they are not taken out from the whole context.

The research is concentrated on the definition of the term flow itself within the framework of television functioning, but on my way to the main definition I also analyzed the other terms, which are interrelated to the flow. For example, scheduling, segmentation, New media age, commercial television, audiences, etc.

I have chosen the chronological way to separate the chapters from each other because the concept of TV flow was mainly changing with the circumstances of time. With every decade technical innovations have become more progressive. Step by step television was changing due to improvement and development of all the means of media communication, and so did TV flow. By this development I mean the forthcoming of 'new media'. This term could be mainly explained as a process when previously established media forms (such as the cinema, radio and television), which are often designated 'old media' are now rapidly becoming technologically antiquated and culturally redundant². Old media are subsequently replaced by more functional ones with updated design.

Methods and sources

Methods which I have used in my work are historical method, comparative method, analysis and critical evaluation of theories and hypotheses. My work consists of both theoretical and analytical parts. In theoretical part I've summarized the textbooks about the television key terms, which became the helpful background for understanding the definition of TV flow. I've explained the majority of concrete

² CASEY, Bernadette. *Television studies: the key concepts*. 2nd pub. London: Routledge, 2008, Taylor & Francis, p.180, ISBN 0-203-96096-3

terms with which I'm going to work in the analytical part. Then, in analytical part I've described and critically reviewed the main concepts and definitions of TV flow. I used the statements of different scholarships as a basis for making conclusions whether some of them are still actual nowadays or not. I also made logical assumptions and tried to broaden the discussion about TV flow on the basis of already existing flow theories. I also mentioned few personal TV experiences for the better understanding of the flow and compared them with the experiences, being described in some of the sources of my work. The historical method lies in collecting information about TV flow according to decades since the first use of TV flow term till nowadays. The comparative method took place in comparing the scientific points of view of different scholarships. I've outlined their approaches to the topic of TV flow and compared in which TV flow strategies they agree or disagree between each other. I tried to reveal which theoreticians had mutually argued or denied each other's definitions.

The whole notion of flow is one of the most developed systems of the methodological approaches to the viewers in television studies. Flow is obviously a path-breaking term in the theory of television conception that is why I will mention some historical aspects of its forming. Also my work will be based on the scientific opinions of famous scholars who had already explored, investigated this term and had made a certain contribution to the television flow as a part of television culture. The concept of flow was the important topic for the diversified debates. The subject of TV flow was theorized in the different spheres of expertise by such scholars:

- Raymond Williams
- John Ellis
- Rick Altman
- John Fiske
- Jane Feuer
- Horace Newcomb
- Klaus Bruhn Jensen

Theories and definitions of these scholars have become the direct sources of my research, because all of them have worked out their own individual theoretical concepts. They have created the core progressive theories to define what TV flow

is. Then these definitions were only improved and analyzed by other media critics. The sources also include theoretical discourse of TV flow since the end of 1970s till nowadays and the main studies which were dedicated mainly to the subject of TV flow. I will name the concrete books and articles gradually, according to the order of reference in my research.

The contribution to the field of TV studies – during my work I assumed and classified some sources, theoretical and historical facts to retrace the genealogy of the term television flow. Also I explored and reviewed certain types of TV flow and represented them as a unique system of fundamental relations in the interface between viewers and television. To let you explain the core subject of my research better I have combined different theories of academics into the schemes and classified each scheme in chronological way.

I have tried to explore certain attitudes and understandings of TV flow by society. Furthermore, I've also explored how younger generation is involved in TV flow as a media consumer. I've outlined some of the major changes caused by TV flow which have reflected on the social and economic factors through television. In order to discover my own view to the TV flow notion in media and public communications I will review some of the key theoretical perspectives concerning television flow and how it is related to audience. The other attempt is to investigate the relationship between TV flow and the public sphere. TV flow is one of the reasons why television is significantly reshaped in the light of digitalization and commercial pressures. This work also provides a brief critical review of certain kinds of audience reception of TV flow in a comparative perspective.

The structure of the work includes introduction, four chapters, general conclusion, the list of used literature and sources.

The term “flow” is also used as a key concept in the context of not only cultural studies but also as a leading concern for commercial, political and economic uses of global television. In my work, I consider some of the permanent uses of the term flow, and the influence of it on the viewers as an object of study. I had tried to represent television flow as a program of ways and capacities, which forms:

- types and models of viewer's interaction with TV flow
- clustered relationships as a result of interaction
- consequences of the mutual interaction within different types of TV flow perception

1. EVOLUTION OF THE TERM AND THE INTERPRETATIONS OF FLOW NOTION

In this chapter I have observed the gradual change of the term “flow” and different approaches to its understanding. The term “flow” itself was borrowed from psychological field of knowledge, that’s why I’ll observe the psychological features of the flow notion as well. In addition to the main studies as the sources of my research I have also used other literature. This literature differs from the sources of my research because authors of these studies don’t create their own theories or concepts but provide estimation and actuality of the statements and ideas, which have already existed before. The critical synopsis of these books has become the part of the first chapter of my work. I will try to do the brief review of certain books and to get a description of how did they help me to understand the flow notion better.

Some of these books are best described as textbooks which concern not only television sphere but psychology and sociology as well (“Optimal experience”). Some are based on the encyclopedia principle (“Television studies: the key concepts”), but the common feature for all of them is that the authors these books have become the interpreters of the flow notion. By interpreting they help to understand the exploration of TV flow phenomenon from primary sources. I will name the other concrete books and articles gradually, according to the order of reference in my research.

1.1. Flow as derivative term from psychology

It is appropriate to mention the suggestion of Johnathan Bignell as the introduction to this subchapter of my research: “Television consists of a flow of audio-visual material that although divided up into programmes, runs on across a period of time without empty gaps in between³”. Coming from this, it is obvious that flow is a continuous stream, which is divided into pieces (or segments) within the framework of time.

³ BIGNELL, Jonathan *An introduction to television studies*. Second edition, Routledge, 2004, p.3

How does it feel to experience flow? It is clear that the term flow has its psychological background. It had appeared in psychological sphere many years before it was transferred into television. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a hungarian psychology professor, who emigrated to the United States. He was the first to propose and to explain the term flow as a part of human psychological reactions. His positive psychology concept has become a part of many fields, not only television.

He insisted: *"I developed a theory of optimal experience based on the concept of flow – the state in which people are so involved in their activity that nothing else seems to matter"*⁴. According to him, flow is the feeling of total absorption, completely focused motivation and full involvement with something.

There are some factors that accompany the experience of flow for a human being. While many of these components may be present, it is not necessary to experience all of them for flow to occur. It is enough to feel just few of them to realize that this special interaction called flow has begun.

- Clear goals that, while challenging, are still attainable.
- Strong concentration and focused attention;
- The activity is a rewarding in fact;
- Feelings of serenity; a loss of feelings of self-consciousness;
- Timelessness; a distorted sense of time; feeling so focused on the present that you lose track of time passing;
- Immediate feedback;
- Feelings of personal control over the situation and the outcome;
- Lack of awareness of physical needs;
- Complete focus on the activity itself.⁵

In his book *Finding Flow*, Csikszentmihályi explains that flow occurs when an individual has a task that has clear goals that need specific responses. *"A game of chess is a good example of when a flow state might occur. For the duration of a*

⁴CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI, Mihály, *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008,p.26 .Harper Perennial modern classics. ISBN 978-006-0162-535.

⁵CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI, Mihály, *Optimal experience: psychological studies of flow in consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.15. ISBN 0-521-43809-8

game, the player has very specific goals and responses, allowing attention to be focused entirely on the game during the period of play”⁶. To his point of view, the flow is a feeling of losing control, because of the total concentration on something. A human could spend hours being involved into some activity or simply absorb the information (for example during the lecture) and he/she doesn’t even notice the passing of time, because of the addiction to the subject of this activity. I’ve mentioned his approach to explain that the flow notion primarily comes from psychology and then it took its place in the television field. In next paragraphs I will try to open up how can the flow occur during the simple TV review and how the interaction happens between a viewer and television broadcasting.

1.2. Critical and auxiliary literature for understanding the TV flow notion

Another opinion belongs to John Corner. He offers a wide range of television criticism and research - from pioneering studies to theory and analysis. The book *Critical ideas in television studies* consists of ten interconnected chapters. Each chapter criticizes some of the ideas about television which have appeared mostly in academic studies. The chapters are always named with one single word - Institution, Image, Talk, Narrative, Flow, Production, Reception, Pleasure, Knowledge, etc., which shows us author’s concentration on each term. Corner works with both social science and the approaches of humanities to television. In the introduction he mentions that television as a research object has three interrelated elements, which make debates about television different from the discussion about other media means such as radio, press or cinema. These elements lie in electronic, visual and mass/domestic character of television⁷. According to this statement flow is not able to appear without any of these elements. The individual chapter №6 of this book is dedicated to the flow. This chapter is structured this way: first five pages are Corner’s attempt for the deep analysis of the pioneer flow notion by Raymond Williams. This passage is called “*Williams on Flow*”. Afterwards there are two subchapters concerning TV flow:

⁶CHERRY, Kendra. What is flow?: Understanding the psychology of flow. *About.com*[online]. [cit. 2014-02-20]. Available at: <<http://psychology.about.com/od/PositivePsychology/a/flow.htm>>

⁷CORNER, cit 1, p.4.

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- “*The Debate about Flow*”. Here Corner mentions the flow theories of Ellis, Altman, Fiske, Caldwell and Dienst.
 - “*The Limitations of an Idea*”. Here he mentions Heath’s and Gripsrud’s approaches to the flow.

At the first passage of the chapter Flow Corner claimed an interesting thought that the idea of flow may be seemed as a “metaphor for the general process of television – a steady outpouring of images and sounds from channels and stations into homes and the minds of viewers, often with a high level of continuity across the various genres and formats”⁸. By saying this, he probably means that the whole concept of flow is extremely exaggerated, he hints that in many cases the word flow was used simply to name the action TV broadcast does. This thought is also expressed in this sentence: “*Some uses of “flow” simply pick up on the term in this common-sense way and do not give it any more ambitious, conceptual meaning*”⁹. Corner even assumes that Williams used this term on the simple level of meaning and he couldn’t even expect it to develop into a progressive concept.

The important point that Corner have noticed is that Williams see distribution as an integral part of flow. Williams admits that television itself has distributive character and finds distribution as a tool for programming. Williams insists that distribution and programming are the methods of organization of developed broadcasting system. If we continue this logical chain we see that as a result of distribution and programming, “planned flow is the defining characteristic of broadcasting”¹⁰. As he considered flow, programming and distribution, as the equivalent, interacting phenomena, it gives us an explanation of why does he call flow planned.

Another main innovation by Williams which Corner have represented and explained is the *inclusion*. This word was used by Williams to express one more component of TV flow. “...a planned flow, in which the true series is of the published sequence of programme items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences together compose the real flow”¹¹. I’ve cut this

⁸Ibid.p.60

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. p.61

¹¹WILLIAMS, Raymond. Television: technology and cultural form. London: Routledge,2004, Taylor & Francis, p.90.ISBN 0-203-42664-9

word from the context to explain that by inclusion he means interruption by trailers, commercials: the whole mixture of programmes.

The main contribution of John Corner lies in providing his specific vision of a TV flow as a part of pathology of television, a bad feature of general “programme organization”¹². And the inclusion can be considered as a main reason of this pathology. All in all, according to Corner, the sequences, from which the flow consists of must be congeneric. By congeneric I mean the presence of some identical features or functions between the sequences.

The book *Television studies: key concepts* was very useful for me on my way to open up the main goal of my research, because as I’ve already mentioned, it is based on the principle of encyclopedia. Here is how the author describes his own book: “...*this book is not a dictionary, nor a definitive guide to the precise content and boundaries of television studies. Rather, it is intended as a map of the territory, an indication of what has been covered, how and by whom*”¹³ This book contains 86 concepts, which are alphabetically organized and really simple to use. For my research I’ve chosen such concepts, which are the closest and most necessary for understanding TV flow: *New media, scheduling, commercial television, audience*.

As I said earlier, *New media* is a process of replacing and renovating of old means of media communication. In case of television it is obvious, that it still occupies a certain niche for audience even if we take into account new media revolution. Casey and other authors of this textbook insist that “a key aspect of the perceived impact of new media technologies regarding television is that digital interactive systems will enhance the experience of television in terms of reception quality and in terms of choice and diversity”¹⁴. That means that digitalization leads to the wider choice of viewer what to watch and when. As a result the viewers are no more tied to the scheduling of some TV broadcasting or channel and they could probably schedule their TV flow by themselves. These are the main factors that “threaten” and deny the absorbing power of TV flow on audience and makes us rethink the relevance of

¹²BUONANNO, Milly. *The age of television: experiences and theories*. Malta: Guttenberg Press, 2008, p.81. ISBN 987-1-84150-181-9

¹³CASEY, cit. 2 p.11

¹⁴Ibid. p.180

Williamse's TV flow concept. New media leads to a shift away from a broadcasting model (analogue, terrestrial, limited channels, mass audience) to a narrow-cast model (digital, interactive, multiple channel, niche markets and segmented audiences)¹⁵. That means that the authors of the book *Television studies: key concepts* explain term "new media" not only as a replacing of older means of communication by new renovated ones, but also as a complex of some consequences, which are produced by this replacement.

Another term *scheduling* is accessibly analyzed in this book. This term closely intertwines with Williams' and Ellis' conceptions of TV flow. That is why it is important for my research. Casey has started with the pioneer concept by Ellis who saw scheduling as the 'architecture', giving structure and meaning to blocks of programmes on a given channel. Ellis also claimed that scheduler is the one who is responsible for the whole narrative of viewing, which was created by the mix of different programmes¹⁶. Coming from Ellis' theory, Casey insists that maximizing of advertising reviews is the core aim of broadcasters. All in all scheduling is a strategic planning of programmes with the main aim to increase the advertisement reviewing and ratings of TV channels. The time of the day when the programme or commercial blocks are shown also plays a great role for the scheduling, because the number of reviews depends on the placing of the programme in the right order. Less popular are placed, when the main part of the viewing audience is predictably at work and more popular ones— on weekends, where most part of them are at home¹⁷.

Another key concept which also mutually influences TV flow term is *commercial television*. Returning to Williams theory, commercials are the integral parts of TV flow that we must absorb over the day¹⁸. Describing this term, Casey mentions historical and comparative discourse to US and British media from 1950s to 1990s. The main point of it is that of commercial television has taken very different forms on each side of the Atlantic. US television history, commercial sponsors and advertisers have exerted a good deal of direct and indirect control over content,

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid. p.241

¹⁷Ibid. p.241

¹⁸WILLIAMS, cit.11, p.91-2

style and scheduling of programmes and this continues until today. In Great Britain, the history of television has been dominated by the ideals of public service broadcasting (PSB), even though commercial television has existed for some four decades. The term "public service broadcasting" means that broadcasting is formed for the public and it is financed by both governmental and individual fees. In other words, their broadcasting can't go after purely commercial purposes. They have specific limits for that. Every broadcasting including television, radio and other electronic media should have a goal to serve the public and to intend television for general public¹⁹. While US construction of commercial television worked on the principle of audience as consumers, in Great Britain the PSB system constituted its audience as citizens. Maybe this difference between British and American commercial television has become one of the reasons of Williams' cultural shock from often commercial breaks in Miami²⁰. Originally Raymond Williams is British. As far as commercials are a part of flow, it is possible to make an assumption that this different perception of commercials in US and UK has influenced Williams. Coming from this, the whole pioneer TV flow theory was born basing on the perception of this fact.

The interaction of TV flow is only possible with its main consumer - *audience*. According to Casey et.al., in media studies, the category of audience refers simply to the act of viewing, reading or listening to media texts. Every human can become a part of different audience in different time. For example, today I'm a viewer of sports channel and tomorrow I'll watch *Animal planet* TV programme of BBC. And it is not even measured by days, because the choice when to switch the other channel lies on a viewer. And by switching the other channel you are becoming a part of the other audience. Nowadays media markets create audiences for globally exported TV programmes – from Baywatch to Mr. Bean – that cross social class, nationality, occupation, education, race and countless other boundaries. To my point of view, audience can be called a certain category of the viewers, which defines the character and stream of TV flow. Casey and other authors see it from the other side, their position is based on the different meaning of category: "...audiences are not

¹⁹RABOY, Marc. *Public Broadcasting for the 21st Century*. UK: University of Luton Press, 1995, ISBN 1860200060

²⁰ The description of this experience is on page 21 of this research

seen as a category to be understood, but as a commodity to be sold to advertisers”²¹. Generally, Casey et. al. admitted the direct connection between commercial television, advertisement on one side and audience on another one.

The television studies book by Christine Geraghty and David Lusted is another auxiliary material of my research. Especially I’ve paid attention to the position of Jostein Gripsrud (the professor in the department of media studies at the University of Bergen, Norway), which is well described in this book. There is a chapter in this book, which concern TV flow topic directly: ‘Television, broadcasting, flow: key metaphors in TV theory’. This chapter has two smaller subchapters “Flow: A transatlantic trope”, “Flow and images of the audience”. Firstly, Gripsrud insists that the theory of Raymond Williams, which was born in Miami, gradually loses its value. It happens due to the changes in television connected with the remote control, subject-specific channels and interactive web sites. All this things have changed the viewing procedure. Nevertheless he writes, that Williams’ idea of flow has in some way “underpinned modern critical television theory”²², so he recognizes the importance of it on the common level. Gripsrud noticed, that it was very keen of Williams to compare TV flow experience with reading a serious newspaper. By serious I mean, that it includes political news, gossips, sports column, fashion column, weather forecast, advertising, reviews of popular books and CD’s, etc...Reading of a newspaper of such kind analogically pour you into different spheres and different points of interest during the concrete period of time. That feeling is almost identical to the TV flow, because collecting of all this information during a short period of time produces an uninterrupted stream of thoughts and impressions in your head.

The main contribution to flow theory by Gripsrud lies in his hypothesis about the flow dependent on a culture of society. His approach differs from others because he tried to approve that flow is culturally widespread and flow is an important part of general experience²³. The point is in difference of the viewing process in different countries and the opposite corners of the world. Everything depends on the personal

²¹Casey, cit. 2,p.23

²²GERAGHTY,Christine,LUSTED,David. *The television studies book*. London: Arnold, 1998, p.2 ISBN 0340662328

²³ Ibid., p.11

attitude of a viewer to “the box” and to the flow it creates itself. According to the classical mass culture theory, there are two categories of viewers: passive and non-discriminating on one side; active – on another. The point is that Williams’ theory carries the features of the audience of his generation (by his generation I mean 1970-80’s).

Gripsrud claimed one more hypothesis, which is important for my research. He suggested that notion flow can be tied to the development of the programming in a situation of competition between broadcasting channels²⁴. By competition Gripsrud means a fight for a viewer and for the bigger number of viewers. This bigger number is important, because it influences the indexes of television statistics. Coming from this it is clear that the ratings of the channel depend on the number of views. To reach the purpose of increasing the number of views, channels compete in forming the TV flow, which will attract average viewer. The main factor that plays role in forming TV flow is taking into consideration interests of the viewers. All in all, Gripsrud is trying to explain that broadcasting’s power is increasing, because it continues to serve elite interests in distributing cultural values. But nevertheless, he insists that in future, interactive technologies will effect viewer behaviors to the less extend, but they will still have the dependence on the viewer.

All these scientific interpretations, scholar’s opinions and assumptions, which were explored in this chapter create a model of TV flow term evolution. This model analyses television content in all various textual level and forms. They are valuable for my research, because they give the necessary background for the building of the further generalization of the TV flow notion.

²⁴GRIPSRUD, Jostein. *Television, broadcasting, flow: key metaphors in TV theory*. In: *The television studies book*. London: Arnold, 1998.

2. TV FLOW AS AN OBJECT OF DETERMINATION IN 1980S

A research pioneer of the flow notion Raymond Williams (1921-1988) was a famous welsh academic, sociologist, novelist and critic. The idea to create the term “TV flow” belongs to him and he was the first to introduce it. He represented the phenomenon of planned flow as a technology and as a cultural form and suggested the theory of the television as a textual system.

In 1980s he focused his attention on the theory of planned TV flow. His work became a useful foundation for the field of all the future cultural studies and conceptions dedicated to the TV flow.

2.1 Concrete definition of the term “flow” in Raymond Williams’ book *Television Technology and Cultural Form* (1974)

His powerful book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* was first published in 1974, long before the dawn of multi-channel TV, or the soap operas, celebrity shows, or talk shows that now pack the schedules of TV channels. This book can be called a first classic of TV studies although some may say it is very old-fashioned and out of time. We are now in the middle of Digital Era or in other words – New Media Age. Williams' analysis of multi-television's institutions, programmes and practices, and its future prospects don't predict the modern engine of television. To my point of view Williams hints that earlier television had a huge absorbing influence on people. By this book he marked the beginning for studying this phenomenon.

As we know from the history many of great inventions and scientific discoveries were made very suddenly. “*Sudden exposure to the often bizarre practices of broadcast TV in another country can stimulate fresh thinking about the whole phenomenon of TV. This is the case with Raymond Williams’s concept of ‘flow’ which resulted from his culture shock on seeing US TV*”²⁵. I explored this experience which Raymond Williams once had in Miami and he then described it in the book *Television Technology and Cultural Form*. His experience was crucial and

²⁵ELLIS, John. *Visible fictions: cinema : television : video*. London: Routledge,2001, Taylor & Francis,p.5, ISBN 0-203-13264-5

central for the further exploration of TV flow. He described it this way: the show begins, but cuts to a commercial, which leads to a preview for another show, which leads to another commercial, which takes the viewer back to the show, which eventually give way to another commercial, preview and commercial, all the way through the evening. Here is how he described his feelings: *“A crime in San Francisco”²⁶ began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials but with the romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste New York”²⁷. Williams insists that daily TV review needs to be taken as a whole uninterrupted flow, with each element reinforcing another. In this book he called it “a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings”²⁸. According to this experience Williams convinces the reader of his book, that almost every TV channel creates and design its personal program for every evening. Williams insists that the way in which the flow is organized, without definite intervals, in any case encourages continuous passive perception by a human: *“We can be ‘into’ something else before we have summoned the energy to get out of the chair, and many programmes are made with this situation in mind: the grabbing of attention in the early moments; the reiterated promise of exciting things to come, if we stay”²⁹*. This sentence allows us to confirm that the flow is planned beforehand. In other words, I could assume that flow is built on certain techniques or tricks which help to grab the attention of the viewer. His whole theory is built on the fact that there is a power, which purposely organizes the effect television does. In the subchapter ‘C’ of the 4th chapter – *Analysis of Flow* he admits: *“It is evident that what is now called “an evening’s viewing” is in some ways planned, by providers and then by viewers, as a whole; that it is in any event planned in discernible sequences which in this sense override particular programme units”³⁰*. By saying this, Williams denies the process of programming replacing it by the term flow or in other words – the order of fragments (sequences), which is composed by the viewer itself during one evening.*

²⁶The subject of the original film

²⁷WILLIAMS, cit. 11, p.91-2

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.p.94.

³⁰Ibid. p.93

Williams also compares television flow to the different activities a man could do during the day. For example such type of information perception as reading. He compares the feeling of TV flow with having read two plays, three newspapers, three or four magazines on the same day. I agree, that television can transfer us to the different kinds of activities not even leaving your couch at home. Television replaces you a visit to a talk-show or lecture or a football match in the same day. And although all these “activities” differ one from each other the television experience called flow has in some important ways unified them.

During the analysis of TV flow, Raymond Williams assumed some examples of flow in television, in three different orders of detail:

A) *“First, there is the flow (which is at this stage still, from one point of view, only sequence) within a particular evening’s programmes. For this we can use the general notation which has become conventional as ‘programming’ or ‘listing’³¹”*. To my point of view the thing Williams talks about has a lot in common with scheduling which I’ve mentioned earlier. Both processes scheduling and listing are the main links in creating the chain of flow.

B) *“Second, there is the more evident flow of the actual succession of items within and between the published sequence of units³²”*. It could probably mean, that there are some additional interactive elements in the stream of flow, which help to connect separate sequences to the uninterrupted process. By interactive elements he means concrete images, abstract transitions between the stages of flow development: “Flow of this second kind, however, is centrally important in our experience of television, since it shows the process of relative unification, into a flow³³”.

C) *“Third, there is the really detailed flow within this general movement: the actual succession of words and images³⁴”*. The meaning of this quotation lies in paying attention to different combinations and fusion of parts of flow, which were mentioned at A) and B), and also their stages of movement, interaction and transformations and manipulations through sequence and flow.

³¹Ibid. p.97

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

The separate passage of his book is dedicated to the comparative analysis of British and American television programs. On the basis of this analysis Williams observes the flow of unrelated programs and advertisement blocks. According to his observation, the average experience of watching TV shows the cultural differences in TV flow perception in UK and USA. He admits that these cultural differences could create different combinations of flow. Here is the quotation which confirms it: "In all these ways and in their essential combination, this is the flow of meanings and values of a specific culture"³⁵. The main goal of TV flow is to cause a flow from one constituent element of the broadcast to another³⁶.

³⁵Ibid. p.120

³⁶The idea of TV flow, which Williams has described, inspired me to have the small personal comparative experiment. According to this experiment I confirmed that Williams' idea of flow is outdated. I can admit that the networks plan an evening that is supposed to flow from one element to another, but I am sure that it rarely if ever works out that way nowadays. According to Williams the viewer is imagined sitting entranced, passively viewing one element to the next. But during my evening TV run-through I wasn't passive at all. In my case I was watching The Sopranos episode and when the commercial came on, I was out of my seat immediately. I went to the restroom, then to the fridge, then to my computer, where I've checked my e-mail. When the episode of The Sopranos has ended and the advertisement block started I've switched off the TV. This is the example of my evening review and actually my review is always limited. I could never spend the day watching TV, so I believe that flow interaction do not have the possibility to happen. I assume that nowadays the majority of viewers, especially younger generation, could confirm, that they watch television in the same way I do. Williams defined the term television flow to describe television's sequence of diverse fragments of narrative, information and also advertising. That means that Williams consider advertising and commercials as a very important element of flow. But coming from my experiment I rarely see the commercials as integral parts of the one-evening "flow" as Williams believes. The networks expect viewers to sit passively and be ready to the "flow", but I suspect we- viewers have our own wishes for what we want to watch. A viewer can watch an enormous number of TV series, but mostly by appointment. Although I admitted that nowadays television review works on a principle "by appointment" there are still the other types of a viewer. I can't deny that there is a type of viewer that finds television very difficult to switch off but according the topic of New media age, I've already mentioned, I can admit that DVRs, DVDS, streaming internet, downloading torrents and a lot of other New media components completely contradict to the idea of "flow." Based on this I want to make an assumption, that maybe the idea of flow lost its valuation in relation to television, but flow has probably moved to another sphere.

Returning to Williams's theory today, it is necessary to say that the actuality of it is gone. Even though his theory is fundamental and it became a field for a scientific activity of many television interpreters, it was written in 1970's. With the development of cable television and big number of satellites, the perception of the viewers has changed a lot comparing to the one from Williams's theory of planned flow. The book is ahead of its time, but it is couldn't be eternally predictable. And one more important fact is the absence of relating TV flow with social functions of broadcast television and elementary social and psychological wishes and needs of the audience.

2.2 Raymond Williams' theory: development and conclusions

In the final chapter of the book *Television Technology and Cultural Form* "Alternative Technology, Alternative Uses?" he assumed his thinking process and made important conclusions. Williams looks at technological developments, taking each in turn—video, satellite, transmission, large screen receivers, and cable distribution. Describing these developments Williams only hints to the possibility of TV flow transformation due to the digital era. The problem is that the mental features which were described in this chapter and taken into attention during the construction of broadcasting no longer exist. A viewer and his wishes have changed due to the common social and cultural progress. In this final chapter he also suggested a ways for improvement of the future broadcasting. Williams insists that all the viewers should have equal possibilities and access to the means of media communications. This will create a cultural society, which will be able to discuss and to take part in forming TV broadcasting. Williams admitted that general television is becoming available and can be used to affect, to control and to produce the impact on our social process with help of commercial advertising and data-processing systems. To his point of view, if we do not have the aim to form participatory society, it threatens us and limits our choice of decisions what to watch.³⁷

³⁷Ibid.p.155

Nevertheless, *Television technology and cultural form* is a unique book, because it explains that technical advances and a particular set of social condition create together both the need for broadcasting and the technologies for its realization. Williams has represented a unique theory of planned television flow which depends on the relationship between social structures and processes on the one hand and technical and scientific developments on another.

Scheduling of Tv programmes plays one of the biggest roles in forming TV flow. A television schedule is the running order in which programmes are placed during a day. According to our life experience we can suggest that television is a set of discrete and distinct programmes, but in 1974 Raymond Williams denied that. He admitted that flow is a sequence of images and feelings that we absorb over a whole day or evening. Programmes are mostly broken up by adverts or by trailers for other items, which are not directly related to the narrative of the show being watched. According to Williams, on the one hand this leads to a disjointed and uneasy experience that decreases the quality and bright understanding of what we watch. But on the other hand, for the commercial broadcaster, providing flow of viewing is necessary. It is hoped, for example, that popular programmes will hook people into the sequence of items offered on a particular channel, while trailers will remind viewers of upcoming pleasures, so they don't want to switch the other channel.

As we see, the idea of scheduling has become central in the scientific discussion and it has caused a lot of different thoughts. For example: *"The scheduler's art, then, is not in placing individual programmes into the whole, but in creating a seamless televisual flow that secures channel loyalty. When we look at a television schedule it gives the illusion that we are watching a set of distinct events when, in actuality, we are not."*³⁸ Analyzing this, flow can be as harmful as useful at the same time. Depends on the fact who is the receiver and who is the producer of it. Ellis gives us another definition of scheduling: *"Scheduling is the means by which a day's broadcasting is arranged so that particular programmes coincide with particular supposed events in the life of the family"*³⁹. His definition is based on the

³⁸CASEY, cit. 2, p.243

³⁹ELLIS, cit. 24.p.116

assumption that the schedule of programmes is connected or comes from the expected activities in an average family.

Bernadette Casey et al. also return to Eliss' notion of scheduling and observe his scientific heritage. They find important that: "While individual programmes may be the 'building blocks' of television, the schedule is the 'architecture', giving structure and meaning to 'blocks' of programmes on a given channel. A familiarity with the schedule allows the audience member to order their viewing around particular programmes, perhaps the news or a favourite sitcom or soap⁴⁰. That means that every programme (or other element) of the flow chain must be systematized and the order, in which it is situated in the common hierarchy of all elements is crucial for the forming of TV flow. Finally, this 'architecture' of programme blocks create the whole image of a TV network.

⁴⁰CASEY, cit. 2p.148.

2.3. The alternative approaches to the phenomenon of flow (Ellis, Altman, Fiske)

In 1980's John Ellis⁴¹ was the one who offered an initial refinement of Williams' sense of flow, proposing that the textual system of television is best described as "segmentation". Ellis has criticized the case of Raymond Williams in his progressive book *Visible fictions*. Chapter №7 of this book is named Broadcast TV as a cultural form. In this chapter Ellis writes that for Williams, flow is a feature of TV that severely compromises and alters the separate texts that TV has manufactured⁴². John Ellis kind of renovated this conception and offered an improved refinement of Williams' sense of flow. The main scientific innovation from Ellis was proposing that the textual system of television is best described as "segmentation". What is segmentation to his point of view? In *Visible fictions* Ellis names segment a basic unit of narrative organization on television. "A segment is a coherent group of sounds and images, of relatively short duration that needs to be accompanied by other similar such segments⁴³". That could mean that we can consider as a segment every single commercial, or part of evening TV news, or part of programme, which is interrupted by advertisement block, etc. A characteristic feature of segment is that it could be coherent as a separate unit, but at the same time it could be not connected directly to the next segment. It is interesting to notice the inclination of Williams to the theory of segmentation, which had chronologically appeared later. It is necessary to say that Williams never use the word "segment", but his analysis refers to the fact how segmented the television flow is. In his turn, in 1982, Ellis builds his theory using exclusively the term "segment". Ellis describes television flow as a broadcasting of text in relatively discrete segments - "small, sequential unities of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes⁴⁴". Analyzing his theory, I see segments as the smaller elements, which are united into bigger groups like news stories,

⁴¹Ellis is British former TV producer and professor of media arts at Royal Holloway, University of London.

⁴²BUONANNO, cit. 12, p. 118

⁴³ELLIS, cit. 24, p. 116

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 112

advertisement blocks, or scenes of a narrative. Generally, the flow occurs across these segments.

Ellis proposes very interesting analysis for the mixing items. As Fiske says about Ellis's theory - these segments typically follow each other with no necessary connections, and indeed, news and current affairs programs have made a virtue of this necessity by deliberately mixing items⁴⁵. The examples of these mixing items are: shots of music video, trailers, shots from the forthcoming or past programs. Ellis insists that even drama series and serials, where the narrative requires the principles of logic and produce an effect, may be segmented into short scenes with logical links omitted. The switching between one narrative strand and another in multi-narrative programs such as soap operas is frequently rapid and unmotivated⁴⁶. Fiske believes that Ellis modified the theory of Williams by the systematization of TV flow segments.

TV flow is a system of the helpful ways to adapt the audience to the television. Due to its continual uninterrupted character these ways can be based not only on the visual (sight) sense of a human being, but also on a hearing (audition) sense. Rudolf Arnheim was originally a German art and film theorist, and perceptual psychologist. He learned gestaltism (Gestalt psychology⁴⁷) at University of Berlin and applied it to the other fields of knowledge. In his article *The Forecast of Television* (in his book *Film as Art* 1954) he claims very similar approaches to Altman's although Arnheim's article was written a long time before Altman's theory had appeared. In his article Arnheim didn't relate his thoughts directly to flow. In fact, this term itself has appeared twenty years later, but his article lightly hints to the roots and foundation of the flow notion. Arnheim's article is about the perception of television by different human senses. He admits: "*Eyes and ears have quite different tasks and, correspondingly, are made differently. The eye gives information about shape, color, surface qualities, and motion of objects in three-dimensional space by registering the reactions of these objects to light. The ear*

⁴⁵Ibid.,p.112

⁴⁶ FISKE, John. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge, 2001, Talor& Francis, 353 p., p.82 ISBN 0-203-13344-7

⁴⁷Gestalt psychology is based on the principle when the mind of a human works integrally with self-organizing tendencies. This principle maintains that the human mind considers certain objects in parallel with its perception. Gestalt psychology tries to understand the laws of our ability to obtain meaningful perceptions in all fields of knowledge.

reveals little about the objects as such; it only reports on some of their activities, which happen to produce sound waves.'⁴⁸ Afterword, Arnheim insists, that the collaboration of visual and hearing receptors create the "three-dimensional space and volume"⁴⁹ Arnheim emphasizes that vision and perception are the two elements of human's active understanding. Coming from this, the viewer is the one who organizes his/her perceptions of flow, collects them into structures and forms how to understand them. I assume, Altman was later inspired by his suggestions, especially the way he describes the sound perception of television information by human ears.

This point of view has become the part of Rick Altman's theory. In 1980s Altman suggested to correlate the shaping of television flow to the different ways of absorbing the information by human senses. Rick Altman is a professor of cinema and comparative literature (University of Iowa, United States). His theory is based on the assumption that the culture of the medium produces and determines its flow⁵⁰. In practice that could probably mean that the type flow depends on the culture and goals of the TV network which offer this flow to a viewer. He notes that the soundtrack is unique to the television culture in whole and sound is one of the tools that shape the viewer's flow or his or her experience watching television. According to his hypothesis the viewer's flow is influenced by music or sounds which a human receptors absorb during the review of some programme. He notes that the soundtrack provides the viewer with sufficient plot, cues important events by sound (sound advance, e.g. clapping before it is seen on screen), and creates continuity⁵¹. These sonic elements create an intermittent flow of television. The goal is not to get the viewers to watch carefully, but to keep them from turning the television off⁵².

In his article *Television/Sound*, Altman disagrees with the position of Raymond Williams about relating of flow to "the television experience itself"⁵³. Altman

⁴⁸ARNHEIM, Rudolf. *Film as art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957 p.188

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰ ALTMAN, Rick, *Television/Sound*, In MODLESKI, T. *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass*, T. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p.39-54. ISBN 0-253-35566-4

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³WILLIAMS, cit 11, p.94

doesn't criticize the notion itself, but he doesn't agree with it as the characteristic of television in general. He argues that flow is related not to the television experience itself – because there is no such single experience – but to the commodification of the spectator in a capitalist, free enterprise system⁵⁴. In other words, he thinks that flow has become the process by which a growing number of spectator's activity finds material cost and actually, it becomes a product, which is bought and sold on the television market. He proposes to consider flow as an individual phenomenon, but to correlate it with a parallel notion of household flow. To his point of view soundtrack is a connecting link between these two flows (Williams's planned flow and household flow). Rick Altman suggests two hypothesis as a parts of his flow theory. He admits that flow replaces discrete programming due to the next facts:

- 1) Competition for spectators is allowed to govern the broadcasting situation
- 2) Television revenues increase with increased viewing⁵⁵.

The soundtrack begins to operate when the second fact is becoming a purpose of some network or channel. To increase the viewership and also the ratings of the channel TV industry embed the new effective method to do that. Method lies in leaving the TV sets on even at the moment when nobody is watching it. The core subject of his theory lies in the importance of soundtrack or sounds influence at the time when all viewers are out of room or paying little attention to the TV screen. "The soundtrack provides sufficient plot or informational continuity even when the image is not visible"⁵⁶. For example, the viewer doesn't miss the plot of some sitcom scene while he is at the kitchen, or the viewer still hears the score of the hockey game while he is at the bathroom. That means, that the flow continues to interact with the viewer with the help of sound only.

All in all, soundtrack becomes the major way of manipulation between what Williams calls programming flow and Altman's household flow and by household he means, that this flow appears in a "private" atmosphere (at home, at the waiting

⁵⁴ALTMAN, Rick, *Television Sound*. [online]. 567-581p., p.567 [cit. 2014-04-02]. Availableat:<<http://www.sfu.ca/cmns/courses/droumeva/2013/357/Additional%20readings/Altman%20Television.pdf>>

⁵⁵Ibid.p.2

⁵⁶Ibid.

room at the airport, at the bar, at the break room of some business company, etc.) Unlike the flow of visual images, the soundtrack carries a specific message-carrying ability, which stays with the viewer during the full time while the set is on.

John Fiske is another media scholar. His concepts and theories have been intensively studied around the world now. He was a professor of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and his areas of interest include popular culture, mass culture, media semiotics and television studies.

He is the author of the *Television Culture*⁵⁷ his most influential book, which is dedicated to the analysis of media text and exploring media through the prism of semiotics. The core subject of his book lies in creating a system that promotes interpretation among the continuities and discontinuities of the segments that comprise flow, rather than in terms of a specific, isolated segment or an individual program episode⁵⁸. His theory has unified some main points of Williams, Ellis and Altman, but he tried to estimate them by the reference to semiotics.

This book can be best described as a textbook about television which contain economic and cultural aspects of television. The chapter of this book, which has become the field of my interest and contains Fiske's theoretical approach to the topic of flow is called "Segmentation and flow". I'll try to reveal the essence of Fiske's view to the flow notion. As far as Fisk has deeply explored media semiotics in many scientific publications⁵⁹, he belongs to the most part of critics who see television flow as a readerly or closed text⁶⁰ and this text is opened for different contributions. While exploring Fiske's method it is obvious that he made a lot of references to Christian Metz semiotic concepts. It should be noted that in this aspect his approach has the same roots as Ellis's, because the term "segmentation" is also borrowed from Metz and according to him, Ellis has introduced the term to characterize television's unique cultural/textual form, especially in contrast to

⁵⁷ FISKE, cit.45

⁵⁸WHITE, Mimi, *Flows and other close encounters with television*. In: PARKS, Lisa, KUMAR, Shanti, *Planet TV: A global television reader*. [New York]:NYU Press, 2003, p.97 ISBN 0-8147-6691-9

⁵⁹ Fiske explored this topic in such books as *Reading Television* by J. Fiske & J. Hartley (1978), *Introduction to Communication Studies* (Studies in Culture and Communication)(1990)

⁶⁰FISKE, cit. 45, p.97.

cinema⁶¹. Returning to Fiske, he has summarized mainly the approaches of Williams, Ellis and Altman. The unification of the previous is mirrored in his formulation of TV flow notion according to which: “Flow, with its connotations of a languid river, is perhaps an unfortunate metaphor: the movement of the television text is discontinuous, interrupted, and segmented”⁶². In this quotation the word “discontinuous” refers to Williams’s theory of planned flow; “interrupted” – to Altman’s theory of visual image interruption and replacing of it by the soundtrack; “segmented” – to Ellis’s theory of segmentation. Nevertheless, Fiske writes about “segmentation” and “flow” as about equal notions, maybe even the same thing named differently. Fiske also insists that both segmentation and flow are based on the principle of association: “Williams uses the term “flow” to express this principle, Ellis uses the term “segmentation”, and the difference between the two words indicates the difference between the two approaches to what is essentially the same principle, that of association”⁶³. He talks about association, because he believes, that both segmentation and flow are organized according to associative rather than logical perception.

It is also necessary to mention John Fiske’s argue due to the fact that Williams only sees flow as “a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings”⁶⁴ because of his literary desire for a named author to be responsible for a connected, unified text. Coming from this, Fiske is convinced that flow can be explained as the associative textual strategies based on television’s intertextuality.

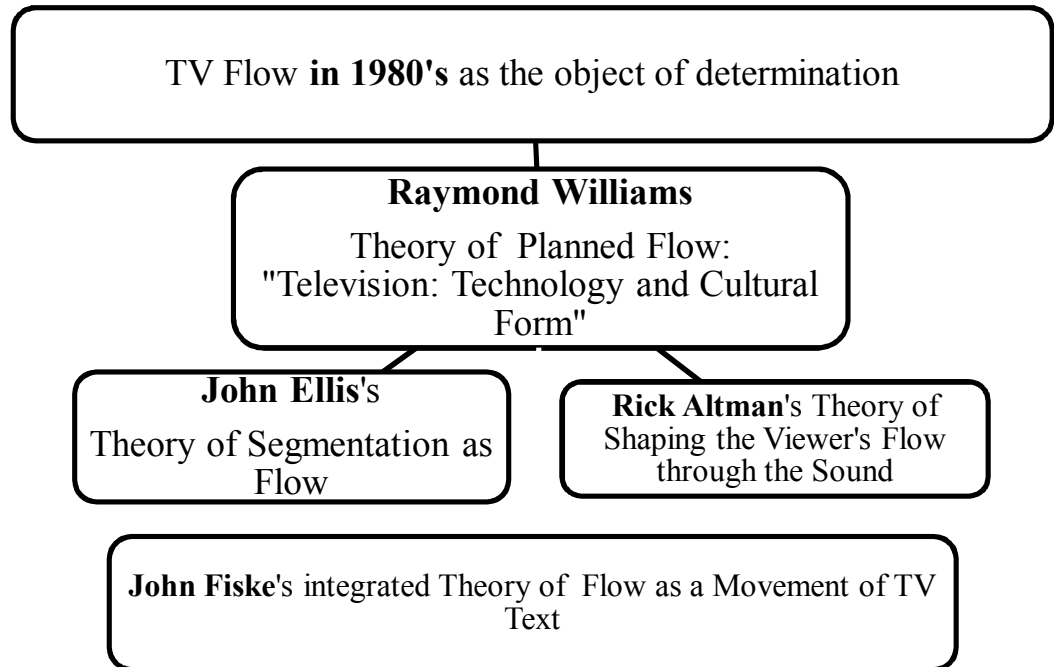
⁶¹ WHITE, cit.57,p. 30

⁶²FISKE, cit. 45, p.105

⁶³Ibid. p.97

⁶⁴WILLIAMS, cit. 11, p.91-2

To summarize all the theories and approaches, which I have mentioned I have composed a scheme (Pic.1).



Pic.1TV Flow in 1980's: the birth of main theories

This scheme shows the key concepts and names of each theory, which has been explored in the first chapter of my research. Theories are situated this way due to the interactions and hierarchy between each other and due to the chronological appearance.

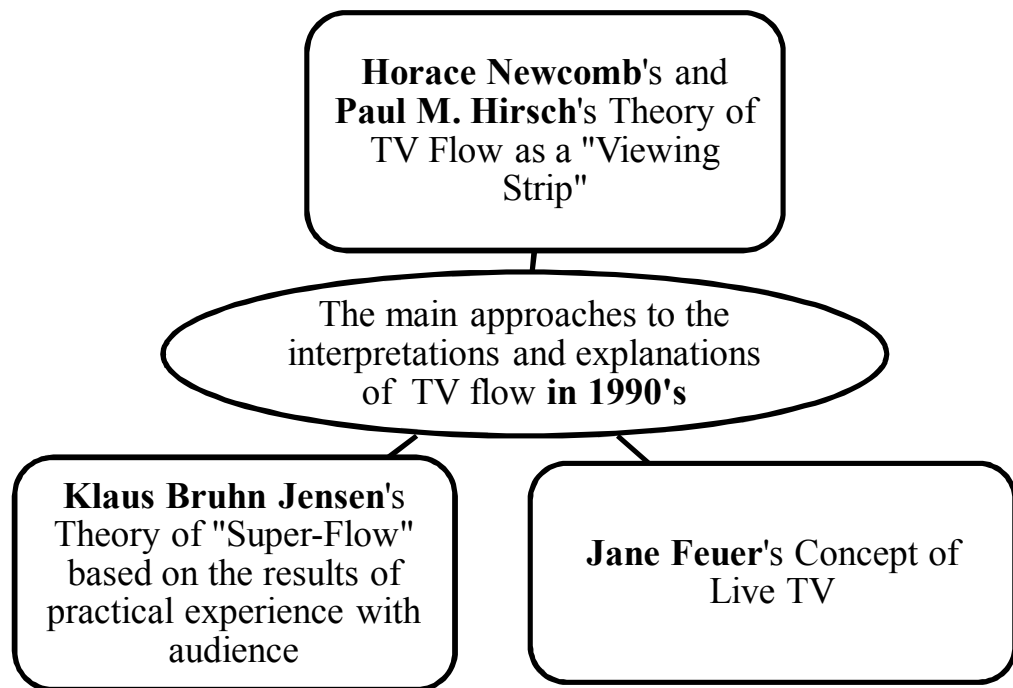
3. THE MAIN APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS OF TV FLOW IN 1990S

The characteristic feature of 1990's is a breakthrough of visual culture. Maybe, due to this fact Richard Dienst admitted that television can be imagined as a profuse flow of images. He understands TV flow as a field of "*total instantaneous visibility*⁶⁵". This point of view he develops in his book *Still life in real time*. According to his approach television can be represented in a number of ways. One of them contains flow as a chain of profuse images. The other one is the machine that produces new social relationships. Richard Dienst mainly uses these two ways for exploration of TV challenges and for building of integrated theory of culture, technology, and media.

Nevertheless, the fundamental structure of TV flow conception in 1990's was built by three scholars: Horace Newcomb, Jane Feuer, Klaus Bruhn Jensen.

To begin with, I have collected three main contributions of the scholars to the development of TV conception, which were made in 1990's into the next scheme (Pic.2). I have chosen these concrete academics, because in addition to interpretation of already existing theories and approaches, they have brought in the certain innovations and they have made new openings in the field of TV flow using the previous theoretical basis of other scholars.

⁶⁵DIENST, Richard, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory After Television*. USA: Duke University Press, 1994, 207 p. ISBN 0822314665



Pic.2 The main approaches to the interpretations and explanations of TV flow in 1990's

3.1 „Viewing strip“ by Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch

Horace Newcomb is a scholar whose teaching activity is oriented on media, society and culture and he has written widely in the fields of television criticism and history. Nowadays he continues his media researches at University of Georgia in USA. Newcomb represented the idea of flow to ground a method for analyzing television according to the medium's textual system. In 1987 he proposed the viewing “strip”—a sequence of programs—as the appropriate unit of analysis of TV flow⁶⁶. Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch explore the topic of flow in the article *Television as a cultural forum*. Firstly, I want to explain why this article is named like that and in what way it concerns flow. The authors of the article insist that television should be seemed as a forum, where everybody can have an answer to some questions: “...in television specifically, the raising of questions is as important as the answering of them. We argue that television does not present firm ideological

⁶⁶WHITE, cit. 58

conclusions – despite its formal conclusions – so much as it comments on ideological problems⁶⁷” In other words, forum is a discussion within television. According to the authors TV forum could appear when television raises a discussion, in which you can take part as a viewer. For example, in everyday life you can become a part of forum by switching on a TV and drawing a parallel between some problems in your personal life and the same problems, which are discussed by the heroes of some talk show or reality show. A viewer enters the forum when he realizes himself as a part of special interest group or uses this group to speak about television. Newcomb and Hirsch also mention the importance of defining social topics of the forums (discussions). These topics have to be accessible for different groups of audience, both for media professionals and simple viewers. The model of television as forum brought the new vision of television text. The article analyses few variants of absorbing some TV product. A viewer can either absorb broadcast provision or make an individual choice. “The viewing strip” is a potential text. The strip is used as a specific tool which defines the way in which each individual settle his or her way through the “flow” on offer by selecting the order of sequences they are ready to review. Nevertheless different individuals might produce very different “potential texts” (viewing strips) from the same objects of viewing. This quotation from the article confirms this assumption: “In *Charlie’s Angels* feminists may find yet another example of sexist repression, while fundamentalist religious groups may find examples of moral decay expressed in the sexual freedom...Other viewers doubtless find the expression of meaningful liberation of women⁶⁸”.

To Newcomb’s and Hirsch’s point of view, channel change and channel surfing also play the main role in forming the viewing strip by individual. It is a main control device which allows audience to create the strip. By making own meanings from the television text, individuals are involving themselves to the creation of flow. In fact, the notions “flow” and “viewing strip” are complementing elements.

⁶⁷ NEWCOMB, Horace, HIRSCH, Paul, *Television as a Cultural Forum*. In Horace Newcomb, *Television: The Critical View*, 6th edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN 0195119274

⁶⁸ Ibid.

3.2, „Live TV“ by Jane Feuer

Currently Jane Feuer is a professor of English and film studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Her main areas of interest are popular culture, television, and cultural studies. She connects the meaning TV flow to her concept of “television liveness”. In her article *The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology* (1983) Jane Feuer argues that “television liveness” is not an essential technological quality of the medium, but a part of a TV flow too. Although the article was written in 1983, Feuer has finished the formulation of her live TV concept in 1990’s. Generally, “liveness” is an ideological framework within which most television programming continues to operate. It is a model of how television continually presents itself to viewers, and “positions the spectator into its ‘imaginary’ of presence and immediacy.”⁶⁹

Feuer admits that the discourse of liveness works regardless of the will of viewer and allows television programming to create the effect of continuity among various audiovisual fragments. To give the example, she describes early morning shows or news broadcasts include numerous segments that were shot in separate locations and at different time, but they serve as a connecting link to tie together the different episodes into the illusion of a single temporal action. The idea of television “liveness” produces the same effect of continuous information as Raymond Williams’s famous idea of “flow”⁷⁰

In her article Jane Feuer explores the question of what is the entity of television. In order to find the answer to her question she starts a discussion whether television flow is ‘a thing itself that practices signs’ or ‘a means of transmission and therefore conducts other processes of signification’⁷¹. Feuer tries to reveal what specific qualities define television flow’s essence, which is a significantly different notion for every scholar, who explored it. In her article she often mentions Herbert Zettl’s approach. Zettl suggests that the meaning of flow must be combined with

⁶⁹GADASSIK, Alla, *At a Loss for Words: Televisual Liveness and Corporeal Interruption*. Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism [online]. 2010 [cit. 2014-04-03]. Available: <<https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/jdtc/article/viewFile/4386/4114>>

⁷⁰FEUER, Jane, *Concept of Live TV: Ontology as Ideology*. In: KAPLAN, Ann. *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches - An Anthology*, Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1983, p.12-22. ISBN 089093584X

⁷¹Ibid

television's technological processes. Referring to Zettl, Feuer agrees with his hypothesis of equalizing live television with real life. Feuer explains that her ontological approach is based on the live element of television and claims that this live aesthetic in itself is at the base of her philosophical conception of flow. Television is an institution, which creates a sort of identification for all messages that are transmitted by it. All these messages are perceived by viewer as 'live'. That means that consumers are placed into a position where they perceive their time, which they have spent in front of the TV screen regarding the time. According to Feuer, this could create the perception feeling of immediacy of live television. The term live itself could be explained differently, which leads to several different variations of the term. A term could be explained comparing to the signifying meaning which is based on technical aspects. These aspects unite opposed meaning of live television and real time, especially since this ideological liveness of television now exists in an age where television programs are broadcasted in a digital way. On this basis I can suggest that by her ontological theory of live TV Feuer refers to Raymond Williams' concept of 'flow'.

Another point made in her article is the representing of flow as a way of explaining the spontaneous character of the experience of television gives. Television becomes this uninterrupted, never ending stream which makes impossible to separate the information it gives. All in all, Jane Feuer's main innovation lies in the smoothing effect of "liveness" as a part of TV flow. She finds that this smoothing effect of liveness makes commercial breaks less evident and perceiving. Her theory is explaining the advantages especially for commercial purposes of broadcasting. Due to the smoothing effect of "liveness" the viewer doesn't strictly realize when commercials are going to occur. As a result, viewers begin to watch commercials more, creating a large and proper audience for advertisers. As far as almost every average family has a TV set at home, TV flow as liveness has become the part of everyone's daily lives.

3.3, „Super-flow“ by Klaus Bruhn Jensen

Klaus Bruhn Jensen's theory is the last one in the analytical part of my research. Klaus Bruhn Jensen is a media and communication scholar. Currently, he is a Professor of Media Studies at the University of Copenhagen. His work and academic research are concentrated on the reception, uses, influence and other effects of media. In 1990's he was a key figure in shaping the new reception studies on international level. He also examined the unexpected ways in which people understand media contents. He founded the new approaches to the TV flow notion through the framework of the audience perception. His approach and vision of TV flow differs from the approaches of previous scholars, because he tried to experiment some of his theoretical assumptions on the direct practice with audience. Klaus Bruhn Jensen had represented the television flow as a reception. In 1995 he identified a new theory of "super-flow" based on examining the actual shifts made by a number of respondents on a particular night⁷². Also he explored how the model of flow can link the viewer's world with televised world using his/her preferences and interests.

Bruhn Jensen's differentiated theory is unique, because his vision of flow is separated into three subtypes: channel flow, viewer flow and super-flow. Channel flow and viewer flow, were already explored earlier by Williams, Ellis and Newcomb. The main innovation of his theory lies in relating these two types into the separate category named super-flow. By including the channel flow to his theory he refers to Williams's theory of planned flow and he agrees with his assumption that every television network plans its own specific channel flow to keep the viewer near the TV screen for as long as it is possible. The viewer flow is characterized by him as a personal subjective forming of flow by every viewer according to his/her own wishes and interests. When viewer is focused to find the most attractive programme, he automatically forms his flow. Finally, these two categories are related to everything that is available on all channels in common.

Bruhn Jensen's practical experience was made on the American television viewers. This experiment made him realize that with the advent of multichannel television all

⁷²JENSEN, Klaus Bruhn, *Channel Flows, Audience Flows, and Super Flow: A Study of Danish Viewers' Reception of Television as Flow*. Copenhagen: Københavns Universitet, 1992, p.16.

the other types of flow are dependent on super-flow. The experiment showed that in some way all the channels have a power to keep the viewer away from zapping. By zapping he means channel surfing or channel hopping – skipping from channel to channel in order to find something interesting⁷³. Coming from this he made a conclusion that no matter how well-grounded was the viewer flow by other scholars, the whole time while it forms is limited by the super-flow. In other words, super flow is carefully organized and controlled by the broadcasters. Programmers, advertisers and producers of the channels manipulate the viewer's choice by limiting his time for it⁷⁴.

⁷³JENKINS, Henry, *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006, p.78, ISBN 0814743072

⁷⁴MOE, Hallvard. *Television ,Digitalization and Flow: Questioning the Promises of Viewer Control*. In: SPYGEL, Lynn, Olsson, Jan. *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004. ISBN 0822333937, Available: <https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/2150/Hallvard_Moe_Television_Digitalisation_and_Flow_paper_2005.pdf?sequence=1>

4. THE THEORETICAL SUBTEXT AND THE SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE TV FLOW CONCEPT NOWADAYS. A PLACE OF TV FLOW IN MODERN TELEVISION

Some of the theoretical ideas which I've represented in my work may seem useful as the historical background, but absolutely unapplied in modern life. Our generation is now in the middle of New media age or Digital age or Computer age. Although television still occupies a certain niche in this age, the other means of media have become more popular. So how did this impact flow? Is it possible to assume that TV flow has transferred to the other sphere and works on another level?

Flow can be represented in different ways, different approaches can be used. One of them is to explain the flow as a chain of pictures, episodes, as an original mosaic of images. This mosaic becomes a whole new world for a viewer, it creates some different reality. In this reality the viewer may feel himself much more happier and doesn't want to leave it. This psychological kind of addiction can't make the viewer come off the television and wait for the new episode of sitcom for example.

This psychological aspect is closest to Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow which I've mentioned in the first chapter of my research. I assume that television flow and scheduling as a part of flow can be used as a great tool for the building of different reality and holding a viewer in it. Basing on this it is possible to make a logical assumption that television flow could be used for imposing some information. I allow myself to assume that nowadays flow is based on psychological factor to the larger extent.

As far as one of the methods I use in my work is historical method I will allow myself to make few logical assumptions on the basis of historical facts. As we know from history, television was used for political propaganda more than once. It is obvious that television is a powerful instrument for advertising and propaganda. Television flow is an integral part of the television phenomenon in whole. On this basis and the fact of informational influence of television I am making an assumption: the historical roots of television flow had appeared long time before Raymond Williams named this term. The role of TV flow can be both enlightening and destructive for the viewer and this fact was noticed a long time ago. For

example in the Third Reich TV broadcast was permanently used for massive propaganda. Distribution, scheduling, programming and flow of Nazi Germany was built on this principle and it was totally controlled by Joseph Goebbels-German politician and Reich Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945. Just because this interaction wasn't named by the term "flow" yet, doesn't mean that it didn't begin its forming as a phenomenon before Williams' definition. I used this worldly famous example of propaganda to confirm that the formation of TV flow was influenced by the whole television history, not only by the theories of scholarships which began to appear in 1980s.

It is obvious that this formation of the TV flow notion hasn't stopped from that moment till nowadays. On the contrary, this topic rapidly becomes popular. Modern TV also uses other approaches to the formation of flow. For example, when a TV channel focused on the certain audience: children, animal lovers, sports fans, TV-shoppers, etc.. In comparison with the propaganda type of constructing flow, this method does not impose anything to a viewer, but it still depends on the type of the viewer. That's why modern flow is a very segmented phenomenon, which constantly develops with mutual influence. The influence directly depends on 1) aims and policies of the television networks and channels (for example propaganda, advertising, entertainment) and 2) the type of viewer.

Nevertheless, there is a third method of forming flow. This type can be called individual; it is based on the assumption, that the viewer is the one who is responsible for his/her flow. This method is progressing due to the birth of alternative sources of flow. By alternative sources I mean online resources, social networks, virtual libraries and other consequences of New Media Age. In this case, the viewer himself is the creator of his flow by doing a break in his TV review or choosing websites that he wants to see. "In other words, the viewer is encouraged to organize the flow he or she wanted to experience"⁷⁵. Nowadays DVRs, Electronic programme guides, Tivo and Playercam⁷⁶ have become the greatest media heritage of humanity. It is possible to pause the playback and it still will not change the interests of the viewer. Coming from this I have pointed out that the flow doesn't

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Digital video recorders with a streamlined guide of television programs

stop and it still exists nowadays. Today we see the flow in a different shape and it has become more flexible through its dependence on the personal interests of the viewer.

Nowadays, the medium's social and political status is different, and so are the relations between sender and user of television broadcasting. Two contradicting trends have marked the development of the medium in current period. On the one hand, television is less popular, not only because a massively increasing output of channels relies on reruns and pre-recording programmes, but also due to the possibility to watch this reruns from internet online channels and even download them to computer. Such equipment makes it easier to manually save programs for later viewing. In addition, these recorders can automatically choose, save and display media content if you choose the right settings⁷⁷.

Due to the present state of television, the notion of TV flow needs to be fundamentally renovated. The nature of media flow research needs to be re-conceptualized differently comparing to previous notions by the reason of digitalization. TV flow is no longer a two-side process between sender and receiver, which serves to satisfy interests of broadcasters. The intervention of the digitalization process into the TV flow can't be unnoticed. The next passage presents a brief critique review of some modern approaches to media flow research through the prism of digitalization. I believe, that the role of it for the media sources and channels makes the direction of TV flow less controlled. From the opposite point of view, the viewer becomes more independent and the range of his choice of communication means broadens. Digitalization can be characterized as a presentation of information, sounds and images through the television in the form of digits.⁷⁸ Nowadays digits are synonymous with computers. Digitalization is closely tied to the electronic manipulation of TV flow. In computer sciences computers are

⁷⁷MOE, Hallvard. *Television, Broadcasting, Flow: Key Metaphors in Online Media Theory?* In: GERAGHTY, Christine, LUSTED, David. *The television studies book*. London: Arnold, 1998, p.17-32. ISBN0340662328, Available:[online]

<http://www.academia.edu/1477602/Television_Broadcasting_Flow_Key_Metaphors_in_Online_Media_Theory>

⁷⁸GRIPSRUD, Jostein. *Broadcast Television: The Chances of Its Survival In a Digital Age*. In: SPYGEL, Lynn, Olsson, Jan. *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, London: Duke University Press, 2004, p.210-223. ISBN0822333937, Available:[online]. <<http://web.mit.edu/uricchio/Public/television/GRIPSRUD%20-%20BROADCAST.pdf>>

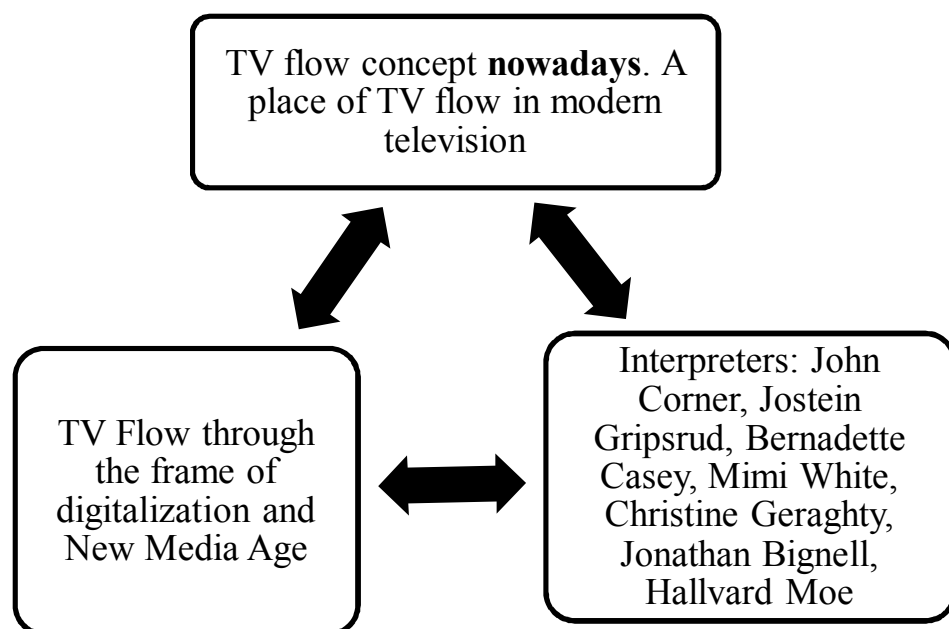
often called digital because they consist of the units called bits. Jostein Gripsrud explored three major consequences of digitalization technology:

1) Convergence. By convergence he meant that internet has blurred the lines of difference between smart phones, TV set, computer and other devices. Digital convergence has made it possible for media organizations (or individuals) to deliver text, audio, and video material over the same wired, wireless, or fiber-optic connections⁷⁹

2) Radically increased capacity of transmission. Saying that, Gripsrud predicts the enormous increasing of digital TV channels;

3) Interactivity. For example, this process has an aim to actualize the use of video-on-demand, when a viewer will have the possibility to choose which of the camera angles he wants to choose for watching sport match (for example)⁸⁰;

All these consequences have become the parts of the developing digital communication since the late 20th century till nowadays. Simultaneously, these three factors have become the main reasons why television flow changes in the lights of digitalization. Summarizing the main points of this chapter I have united them to the next scheme (Pic.3).



Pic.3.TV flow concept nowadays

⁷⁹JENKINS, cit. 68

⁸⁰Ibid, p.213

The global progress of means of media communications makes the meaning of TV flow more contradictory. New culturally-based models and methods of their exploration are needed for understanding of TV flow in advanced global media.

All of a sudden, the notion of digital television and all the technologies, which are related to it, has weakened the influence of TV flow. Nowadays television broadcasters lost their power to control the viewer fully and younger generation can perceive the existing flow theories with an amount of skepticism. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of multi-channeling is increasing with every single year, which means that the interaction between viewers and broadcasters will never stop. That is why the concept of TV flow will always be significant for understanding the current state of television by mankind's civilization.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

I would like to end here by brief summarizing of the main theses. As a result of my research I have achieved the goal, which I have set at the beginning. I have analyzed the birth and the scientific nature of the term “flow” in media and television context.

1) One of the main sources which I have explored deeply is the theory of Raymond Williams, which he had represented in his famous book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. He represented the phenomenon of planned flow as a technology and as a cultural form and suggested the theory of the television as a textual system. I have analyzed his television experience in Miami, because it is crucial for the forming of TV flow phenomenon. Basing on this experience Williams has pointed out, that almost every TV channel creates and design its personal program for every evening. Williams noticed that the way in which the flow is organized, without definite intervals, in any case encourages continuous passive perception by a human. He admitted that flow is a sequence of images and feelings that we absorb over a whole day or evening. His theory became a foundation for understanding TV flow notion and it became a field for a scientific activity of many media scholars and academics.

2) Particularly, I have observed the sources, which reflect the other approaches to the TV flow notions:

A) John Ellis was the one who offered an initial refinement of Williams’ sense of flow, proposing that the textual system of television is best described as “segmentation”. Ellis has represented his approach to TV flow meaning in his progressive book *Visible fictions*. John Ellis has offered an improved refinement of Williams’ sense of flow. The main scientific innovation from Ellis was proposing that the textual system of television is best described as “segmentation”. In *Visible fictions* Ellis names a segment a basic unit of narrative organization on television.

B) Rick Altman’s approach to flow lies in relating it to the sound perception. In his article *Television/sound* Altman notes that the soundtrack is unique to the television culture in whole and sound is one of the tools that shape the viewer's flow or his or her experience watching television. According to his hypothesis the

viewer's flow is influenced by music or sounds which a human receptors absorb during the review of some programme.

C) John Fiske's approach is reflected in *Television Culture*. It is his most influential book, which is dedicated to the analysis of TV flow as a media text and exploring media through the prism of semiotics. The core subject of his book lies in creating a system that promotes interpretation among the continuities and discontinuities of the segments that comprise flow, rather than in terms of a specific, isolated segment or an individual program episode. His theory has unified some main points of Williams, Ellis and Altman, but he tried to estimate them by the reference to semiotics.

3) I have analyzed the contribution of Williams, Ellis, Altman and Fiske as a historical and theoretical fundamental background of the flow phenomenon. I consider them the founding father of the TV flow notion, who gave the other scholars and academics a field for the scientific activity and for developing TV flow notion. Founding fathers have introduced the proper scientific terminology for the other followers of TV flow notion. For example they have put into circulation such terms as scheduling, segmentation, commercials, etc. I have explored these terms and also some of other terms, which helped me on my way to reveal the essence of TV flow phenomenon. For example such as: broadcasting, audience, New media, digitalization.

4) I have classified and described the main analyses of the flow notion interpreters such as John Corner, Bernadete Casey, Jostein Gripsrud, Mimi White, Hallvard Moe, who have summarized the developing of the TV flow conception. Through their vision of flow I have formed the chronological evolution of the TV flow phenomenon. These scholars have focused their attention on the psychological, technological, social and cultural determination of flow.

5) Using the comparative method in my research, I have composed and compared the scientific positions of such scholars as John Ellis, Horace Newcomb, Jane Feuer, John Corner, etc to the pioneer TV flow definition by Raymond Williams. I have estimated in which aspects they argue, agree or deny each other's approaches. For example:

- By creating the ontological theory of live TV Jane Feuer refers to Raymond Williams' concept of 'flow'

- In his article *Television/Sound*, Altman with the position of Raymond Williams about relating of flow to the television experience itself. Altman doesn't criticize the notion itself, but he doesn't agree with it as the characteristic of television in general.

-In his book *Visible Fictions* Ellis agrees with Williams' scientific point of view about TV flow, but he has modified the theory of Williams by the systematization of TV flow segments.

6) Using the historical method I have confirmed, that during every decade, since the first use of TV flow notion by Williams till nowadays, certain scholars were making a step in the development of the TV flow theory.

- In 1980's: Raymond Williams – The Theory of Planned Flow; John Ellis – The Theory of Segmentation as Flow; Rick Altman -Theory of Shaping the Viewer's Flow through the Sound; John Fiske - Integrated Theory of Flow as a Movement of TV Text
- In 1990's: Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch – The Theory of "viewing strip"; Jane Feuer – The Theory of Live TV; Klaus Bruhn Jensen – Super Flow Theory
- Nowadays – TV flow through the framework of digitalization was explored by such scholars as Jostein Gripsrud, Mimi White and Hallward Moe.

In this research I have focused my attention on the theoretical and historical aspects of the TV flow notion problem. But I consider the experimental and practical aspect is also very important for my research. Coming from this point of view, I see the continuation of my research in realization of such further aspects:

- The analysis of the concrete modern TV programs such as BBC, CNN, etc. and tracking the characteristic features of TV flow according to the concepts of Williams, Ellis, Altman, Klaus Bruhn Jensen within these programs.

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- Observation of the historical movement of TV flow in the structure of television broadcasting in Nazi Germany of Third Reich and Communistic China, where flow was used for the massive propaganda
 - Classification of the TV flow perception by different types of viewers on the basis of psychological and social factors.
 - The research could be also continued on the basis of archive materials, which contain the schedules of television programs in different countries. I could analyze the TV flow dependent on the organization of political systems in these countries

By realization of these aspects I will expand the borders of my research and I will get it into the new level of exploration.

In this research I have analyzed TV flow phenomenon as a part of contemporary cultural theory. I have made the conclusion that in the lights of digitalization flow studies can't be considered as just historical. Modern flow has moved to the other level due to the progress of technologies. As far as TV flow is a rather young scientific topic I plan to advance some ideas about the state of contemporary television and media culture in particular, and then to do my own contribution for the future of television flow studies.

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