



Reality, Change, Enlightenment: Reconsidering the Creative Principles of Contemporary Realistic Television Drama

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Abstract. In the context of new media development, this paper explores the distinctive aesthetic principles that set realistic television dramas apart from other literary and artistic forms. Going beyond mere adherence to the Marxist view on literature and art, this paper puts forward a new conceptual framework by arguing that the creation of such dramas should actively incorporate the guiding principles of news writing. This proposition is supported by two key reasons: first, the feasibility of such integration, which stems from the substantial overlap in their core creative elements and normative frameworks; second, its necessity, which arises from the changing narrative approaches of communicators and the shifted communication channels and cognitive patterns of audiences in the post-truth era. Consequently, realistic television dramas must adopt more concrete and rigorous creative principles to adequately respond to contemporary demands.

Keywords: Realistic Television Drama; Creative Principles; News Writing; Post-truth; Media Convergence

1 Introduction

The Marxist perspective on literature and art, which employs Marxist theory to analyze, interpret, and appraise literary works and phenomena, constitutes the fundamental creative principle in China's literary and artistic domain. As a crucial genre within this domain, the production of realistic television dramas ought to be guided by this perspective. The term "realistic television drama" in this paper refers specifically to television plays that primarily depict China's socialist modernization, particularly since the Reform and Opening-up. This genre has long received state support and audience acclaim. As scholar Qiu Wei observes, "The proliferation of realistic themes has evolved from being policy-driven to a spontaneous market behavior." ¹

Amidst ongoing transformations in the media landscape and society itself, there is a pressing need both to reflect contemporary life and cultural heritage in media productions and for scholarly discourse to put forward updated and more rigorous creative frameworks for this genre. This paper posits that the development of realistic television

drama should deliberately adopt the foundational principles of news writing. While traditionally perceived as distinct ideological forms with seemingly little common ground, convergence driven by media technological and industrial development has rendered cross-disciplinary reference not only possible but necessary, as evidenced by the integration of new media in smart manufacturing, industrial design, and the preservation of traditional crafts.

Despite being a focal point in both industry and academia, research on realistic television drama has, for a long time, overlooked two critical dimensions: its communicative influence and underlying creative principles. Scholarly attention has primarily focused on the genre's characteristics, creative challenges, and developmental trends. These discussions range from macro-level analyses, such as examinations of the current state and innovative pathways of creation², to more targeted reflections on specific sub-genres like rural-themed dramas³. A substantial body of literature also comprises periodic reviews assessing the genre's development in given years⁴.

A smaller subset of studies engages in micro-level reflections on creative practice, attempting to distill rules and lessons from aspects such as thematic selection, characterization, plot construction, and the interplay between artistic and realistic truth⁵. However, research explicitly addressing the creative principles of high-quality realistic television dramas remains scarce. The limited exceptions typically approach the topic from an aesthetic perspective, analyzing pursuits like "truth as beauty,"⁶ or investigate the manifestation of a realistic creative view within specific works⁷.

Consequently, a significant research gap persists: there is a lack of macro-level study on the principles that should guide the creation of realistic television drama within the context of the transforming television industry, despite the recognized importance of realism in reflecting contemporary societal issues and the resurgence of realist television drama. Furthermore, while adherence to the Marxist view of literature and art is a consensus within the genre, academic research on this viewpoint remains largely confined to literary theory, and its application and examination within media studies are still notably underdeveloped.

2 The New Context: Narrative, Access, and Cognition in the Post-Truth Era

Since its emergence around 2004, the concept of 'post-truth' gained widespread attention in 2016 amid events such as the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election, and has since become a central term in both academic and industry discussions⁸. This era is characterized by a landscape where "emotions and personal beliefs exert greater influence on public opinion than objective facts."⁹ While it is frequently applied to debates within journalism, the impact of post-truth represents a broader media paradigm shift, influencing all forms of media content and aligning closely with the emergence of a dominant new narrative mode: story-driven narration.

Although lacking a singular authoritative definition, story-driven narration in media can be understood as the skillful use of narrative techniques—such as suspense and climax—to transmit information and diverse narrative elements to the audience. Its

main objective is to create dramatic plotlines and intense conflicts to evoke strong empathetic responses from viewers. Ideally, this effect should be grounded in logical credibility and truthfulness. However, in its extreme manifestation, this mode prioritizes “dramatization” over “authenticity.”

The confluence of the post-truth condition and the prevalence of story-driven narration represents a profound transformation in audience psychology concerning the interpretation of information and the very concept of 'truth.' There is an increasing tendency among audiences to assess truthfulness based on emotional resonance. Consequently, content that effectively evokes emotions—be it fake news or fictional narratives—can be easily accepted as a reflection of reality. From this perspective, realistic television dramas exert a subtle yet profound influence on the audience's perception of the objective world and the construction of values—an influence that is arguably no less significant than that of news media. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the foundational Marxist view of literature and art, it is imperative to critically assess the impact of the 'artistic truth' constructed by this genre. Systematically incorporating and adapting the guiding principles of news writing thus emerges as a critical requirement, necessitated by both contemporary socio-cultural shifts and the evolution of media technology itself.

3 The Feasible Foundation: Shared Logic Between Realistic Drama and News Writing

Although realistic television drama and news writing fall into different ideological and formal categories, they exhibit profound interconnections in their core creative elements and normative principles. This inherent commonality provides a viable basis for realistic drama to actively integrate the guiding principles of news creation.

3.1 The Shared Pursuit of “Truth”: Journalistic Fact vs. Artistic Verisimilitude

The unwavering commitment to truth stands as a hallmark of professional news reporting, forming the ethical and practical foundation of journalism. To ensure journalistic truth, it is imperative that news reporting adheres to rigorous standards of factual accuracy and objectivity. This means that the essential elements of an event—who, what, when, where, and how—must be thoroughly verifiable through multiple reliable sources, and the subject of the report must correspond to actual occurrences in the objective world. This approach is underpinned by a disciplined methodology that includes comprehensive fact-checking, a strong reliance on credible and authoritative sources, and a strict avoidance of speculation or unverified information.

In contrast, realistic television drama, as a form of cinematic art, draws inspiration from the broader realist movement in arts and literature. It seeks not merely to replicate reality, but to capture its deeper essence through authentic and objective storytelling. This genre mandates that plot developments adhere to the internal logic of everyday life, and that character evolution remains consistent with psychological and social realism of real individuals. The creative process involves not only reproducing reality but

also synthesizing, processing, and typifying real-life experiences to reveal underlying truths and broader societal patterns.

From the perspective of communication effects, both forms of narrative—journalism and realistic drama—share a fundamental objective: to construct a credible and persuasive representation of reality for their audience. News works strive to enable the audience to perceive the events and situations described as fully consistent with the actual social world. Similarly, high-quality realistic drama must tell stories that are not only emotionally engaging but also lifelike and congruent with experiential logic, thereby fostering audience identification, empathy, and immersion. This, in turn, maximizes communicative impact and cultural resonance.

Thus, despite their differing methodologies—one bound by the constraints of verifiable fact, the other by the demands of narrative and emotional coherence—both genres are united in a deeper, common endeavor: to build a truthful, meaningful, and influential portrayal of the social world for public understanding and reflection. It is this profound shared commitment to truth-seeking, albeit through distinct lenses, that provides the first crucial rationale for cross-disciplinary learning and mutual enrichment between journalism and dramatic art.

3.2 Convergent Platforms and Overlapping Social Functions

Human survival and development require an understanding of the objective world, and the media—especially mass media—serves as an indispensable channel for this purpose. Scholar Lasswell identified the "surveillance of the environment" function of mass media, meaning it acts as a lookout in society, continuously monitoring, comprehending, and tracking changes in both the external and internal environments. News reporting serves as the primary vehicle through which the media executes its surveillance function, as evidenced by cases where investigative journalism has led to significant government action and public oversight. Furthermore, news media typically function to uphold mainstream values and foster social integration¹⁰. Consequently, news reporting plays a crucial role in shaping, maintaining, and adapting the audience's perception of society and their value systems.

Realistic TV dramas and news reports share mass media as their carrier, both falling within the domain of mass communication. Consequently, Realistic TV dramas also serve functions such as environmental surveillance, upholding mainstream values, and promoting social integration. Through constructing a realistic portrayal of the objective world, these dramas objectively fulfill a surveillance function; they also aid in upholding mainstream values and fostering social cohesion. Research on televised violence, notably scholar George Gerbner's cultivation theory further supports the significant influence of media content on audiences. It posits that increased exposure to televised violence leads viewers to perceive the real social world as more violence-prone, with empirical studies indicating that frequent viewers of violent content tend to overestimate the likelihood of violence in their daily lives. Studies have shown that television content plays a substantial role in shaping audience cognition and values, as evidenced by surveys indicating television's dominant influence over other media in shaping the

values of adolescents. Although initially centered on television, the cultivation phenomenon has expanded to encompass other media, including new media. Therefore, realistic TV dramas that portray the real world similarly exert a significant influence on how audiences perceive reality and shape their values.

3.3 A Bidirectional Interaction with Social Development

The dissemination of news reports and realistic TV dramas engages in a deeply intertwined, bidirectional relationship with the progression of real-world societal development, forming a continuous cycle of influence and reflection. On one hand, real society serves as the foundational and primary source of content, offering abundant raw material and rich contextual frameworks that inherently define, shape, and restrict the boundaries of what can be communicated through media channels. This symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationship ensures that media content remains authentically rooted in actual events, evolving social conditions, and diverse human experiences, thereby maintaining relevance and credibility. On the other hand, the widespread distribution, pervasive consumption, and persuasive power of such media subsequently exert a profound and multifaceted influence on how audiences perceive, interpret, and engage with the objective world. Through repeated exposure and reflective absorption, media narratives play an active and substantial role in gradually molding individual and collective moral and social values, continuously refining accepted social norms, and subtly adjusting public attitudes and beliefs. Over time, these shaped and internalized perspectives result in meaningful, observable changes to personal and group behavior, thereby creating an iterative feedback loop wherein audience members, influenced and transformed by media, begin to engage more critically and differently with their surroundings—ultimately contributing actively to the ongoing evolution and transformation of society itself.

Human beings inherently and fundamentally rely on accumulated knowledge and a coherent, structured understanding of the objective world to navigate complex daily life and make informed, rational behavioral decisions. However, due to the inherent limitations of individual lived experience, finite cognitive capacity, and restricted access to comprehensive firsthand information, achieving a fully comprehensive and wholly accurate grasp of reality without external aids is nearly impossible. Mass media, therefore, emerges as a crucial intermediary and indispensable public resource—enabling the broader public to access, interpret, contextualize, and make sense of complex realities that lie far beyond immediate perception and personal observation. By selectively constructing, curating, and distributing nuanced representations of the world—often termed a “mediated reality” or constructed narrative—mass media channels deliver thoughtfully curated content through diverse formats and genres, gradually but powerfully shaping the audience’s cognitive frameworks, emotional responses, and moral engagement with actual events and deeper social structures.

News, in particular, is widely considered the media genre that most explicitly and earnestly claims to fulfill this representational role, positioning itself as a vital conduit of truth. The principle of journalistic authenticity and integrity is central to this func-

tion, as it demands timely, factual, balanced, and ethically produced accounts of a continuously changing and often chaotic world. This commitment to accuracy and accountability is essential not only for effectively informing the public and supporting democratic processes but also for establishing and preserving long-term trust in media institutions and their social role. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that news is never a perfect, unfiltered mirror of reality; rather, it is a constructed artifact. Prior to publication, raw information undergoes multiple stages of selective filtering, editing, contextual framing, and narrative structuring, influenced by a variety of factors such as editorial gatekeeping, institutional norms, implicit cultural biases, commercial pressures, and practical constraints. As a result, even the most rigorously produced and well-intentioned news effectively presents a mediated construction—a “pseudo-environment” that approximates, interprets, and simplifies, but does not fully replicate, objective reality.

Similarly, realistic TV dramas exercise a potent representational influence through sophisticated narrative art, nuanced character development, and compelling thematic depth. By constructing relatable plots, emotionally resonant scenarios, and emblematic characters that reflect authentic societal conditions and tensions, such dramas effectively and artistically shape audience cognition, social attitudes, aspirational ideals, and behavioral tendencies in a manner that is both engaging and culturally resonant. Whether through factual news reporting or fictionalized yet reality-based storytelling, these mediated representations inevitably affect how people see themselves, others, and their broader world. In doing so, they indirectly and subtly guide individual and collective actions aimed at understanding, engaging with, critiquing, and transforming the objective world. This dynamic establishes a fundamental, persistent, and two-way interaction between media content and social development, wherein each continually informs, alters, and is altered by the other.

4 Conclusion

In summary, the continuous evolution of media technology, which is clearly demonstrated by the widespread proliferation of digital formats and the emergence of innovative narrative modes, has exerted a profound and far-reaching influence on audience cognitive psychology. Simultaneously, the ongoing transformations within the television industry collectively impose more sophisticated and higher-level demands on the creation of Realistic TV dramas. These interconnected developments also provide a crucial and timely insight: in addition to steadfastly adhering to the Marxist view of literature and art as a foundational framework, we must equally actively utilize the guiding principles and ethical standards particularly pertinent to news production. Moreover, the notable and meaningful parallels between Realistic TV dramas and news reporting—especially in terms of their shared creative logic and overlapping social functions—establish a practical and robust groundwork for such valuable interdisciplinary reference and cross-domain application.

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