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A forgotten spirit of commercial television? Co-productions between Finnish commercial television company Mainos-TV and socialist television

Finnish commercial television company Mainos-TV co-produced a string of documentary and entertainment programmes with television broadcasters in the USSR, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary and Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. This article asks what motivated Mainos-TV, a commercial television broadcaster in a non-socialist country, to collaborate with socialist television? Based on an analysis of published and archival sources (e.g. industry documents, memoirs, television programmes and press coverage), the article argues that Mainos-TV engaged with socialist television to secure its position at a time when the operation of commercial television was still quite restricted. Finnish foreign policy placed great importance on maintaining good relations with the neighbouring USSR. In this context, the leadership of Mainos-TV viewed its collaboration with socialist broadcasters as a way to strengthen the company's position. International entertainment programmes and co-produced documentaries on social and cultural topics offered Mainos-TV 'quality' programming that differed from the stereotypical image of commercial television. Collaboration with Eastern European partners was not purely strategic, however, as it also brought influences from socialist television culture to Mainos-TV's offerings. Mainos-TV's co-productions with its socialist partners highlight the largely forgotten complexity of the history of European commercial television.

In 1978, Finnish commercial television company Mainos-TV broadcast a programme called *Neuvostoelokuvan kaksi tekijää* [*Two authors of Soviet cinema*], introducing viewers to the careers of Andrei Tarkovsky and Vasily Shukshin.¹ A co-production between Mainos-TV and the Television and Radio Committee of the USSR, *Two authors of Soviet cinema* opens with views of people queuing outside a Moscow cinema. A Finnish voice-over sets the scene:

About 150 feature films in fifteen different languages are made in the Soviet Union each year. The production is financed by the state, which educates filmmakers for free and provides employment for all. [...] In the Soviet Union, cinema is seen primarily as culture and art. Its value is not measured in viewing figures and box office receipts. The measure is humanity itself, how well a film is able to support spiritual development so that friendship would be friendship, love would be love, sincerity would be sincerity. Capacity for sacrifice, goodness and principledness are emphasized as human values. This naturally requires a society where a person's job and future are secure, where they feel like they do useful work to achieve common goals.

The voice-over offers a critique of commercial mass culture by contrasting it with Soviet cinema, which is characterized not only as art but as a true example of popular cinema made possible by a socialist society with free education and job security. This kind of discourse on commercial television may seem surprising. However, *Two authors of Soviet cinema* was not a complete oddity in Mainos-TV's programming, but part of the company's active, on-going co-operation with television organizations in socialist Europe. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mainos-TV collaborated with partners in several socialist countries, which led to a string of co-produced documentary and entertainment programmes. This collaboration does not easily fit into the established idea of commercial television that is oriented towards entertainment, the political right and the West; nevertheless, it was part of the culture of commercial television in Finland.

Television scholars have distinguished between public service television and commercial television, and between Western European television and socialist television. In the introduction to *A European Television History*, Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers outline three models of television: Western European public service television, which is regulated by the state and required to serve the public good; a model of commercial television first established in the USA and gaining increasing ground in Europe; and socialist television controlled by the state and serving as a 'channel of communication between the party and the people'.² The history of Mainos-TV, which negotiated its culture through encounters with all

three models of television, highlights the hidden complexity of the history of European commercial television. Recent research on contact between Western European public service broadcasters (particularly the BBC) and socialist broadcasters has shown that the Cold War divide did not stop collaboration and knowledge transfer between television organizations.³ Extending this discussion to the relations between socialist and commercial television outside the socialist bloc, this article asks what these relations meant for a company like Mainos-TV? Why did Mainos-TV, as a commercial television broadcaster in a non-socialist country, wish to collaborate with socialist broadcasters? Further, how did this collaboration shape the culture of commercial television in Finland?

To answer these questions, I will investigate the value that Mainos-TV gained from collaborating with socialist television. Following Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood's conceptualization of value, I will trace how Mainos-TV tried to accumulate different forms of capital that it could then convert into value.⁴ Value in this context can mean economic profit but also securing or expanding conditions of operation. To these ends, Mainos-TV cultivated social capital: relationships and group memberships that would strengthen its position. The company also developed cultural capital by creating content that was valued in the cultural and regulatory contexts of Finland. This does not mean that the value of collaborating with Eastern European partners was purely instrumental; for individual Mainos-TV employees, international co-operation could have value beyond exchange, for instance, by allowing them to pursue projects of personal interest or develop friendships. In this article, however, I focus on how relations with socialist television helped legitimize Mainos-TV. I argue that Mainos-TV engaged with socialist television to create value for itself while safeguarding its existence and expanding its operations as a commercial television broadcaster. In the process, Mainos-TV developed a culture that was in some respects quite different from what we currently associate with commercial television.

In this article, I will first address Mainos-TV's discourse on socialist television in debates about commercial television; then I will discuss Mainos-TV's co-productions with television broadcasters in socialist countries. My analysis follows a cultural historical approach to television history, thus tracing the contextual meanings of television from various sources, such as industry documents, press articles and television programmes.⁵ I hope to show that in the case of Mainos-TV during the 1960s to 1980s, the 'spirit of commercial television' not only celebrated entertainment, commercial culture and 'Western' values but also sought to be cultured and pluralistic, oriented towards both Eastern Europe and the West.⁶ This made sense for Finland, whose foreign policy sought to position the country as a 'mediator' between the East and the West, and where relations to the socialist bloc were politically and economically important.⁷ Research on the history of Mainos-TV has shown that its programming brought Anglo-American cultural forms to Finland, for instance, by using US imagery in television advertising and introducing serial melodramas to Finnish television.⁸ However, this relatively small pool of scholarly literature has not addressed Mainos-TV's connections to socialist television.

Socialists do it, too: legitimizing commercial television

While television advertising has a long history in Finland (the first television broadcasts in the country were already funded through advertising), the legitimacy of commercial television remained a controversial issue for many years.⁹ Mainos-TV was established in 1957, the same year Finland's national public service broadcasting company, Yleisradio (YLE), launched its television service. Three foundations—representing advertisers, advertising companies and film companies—constructed Mainos-TV to serve their television-advertising needs. At the same time, Mainos-TV helped finance public service television by leasing broadcasting time on YLE's channels instead of operating a channel of its own. As a result, Mainos-TV was tied to the public service model of television. Mainos-TV functioned under

YLE's operating licence; although it did not have the same public service responsibilities as YLE, it was regulated by YLE's parliamentary Administrative Council. In this sense, Mainos-TV resembled Britain's Independent Television (ITV) network, which has been described as 'commercial television as a regulated public service'.¹⁰

Mainos-TV adopted ITV as its model, setting as its goals to offer information, education and entertainment to a diverse audience with different ages, political opinions and educational backgrounds.¹¹ Accordingly, Mainos-TV's programme policy in the early 1960s sought a balanced output of theatre, art, documentary, educational and entertainment programmes. The company invested in challenging drama and documentary projects to show it was capable of offering programming more substantial than sponsored entertainment and serial fiction.¹² Building an impressive portfolio of programmes was important for Mainos-TV, especially since the future of the company was unclear. During the 1960s, commercial television was a popular topic of public debate, and Mainos-TV's right to broadcast was questioned by politicians and YLE on several occasions.¹³ Memoirs and popular histories have described the development of Mainos-TV as a narrative of oppression and struggle until it is finally promoted to a full-service television broadcaster, symbolized by its acquisition of the right to broadcast news in 1981 and a channel of its own in 1993.¹⁴ However, the regulations and limitations Mainos-TV operated under were also productive: as Mainos-TV strategized on improving its position, it developed practices and programming that a commercial broadcaster in other circumstances might not have developed.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's ideas about the dynamic of the spirit of capitalism provide a useful analytical model for understanding Mainos-TV's position. Here, the spirit of capitalism refers to the ideology capitalism uses to justify itself. Themes such as utility and progress have long been used to defend capitalism, but the spirit of capitalism must always adapt to new circumstances. For Boltanski and Chiapello, critique is a key driving force in

this dynamic: it can make previously successful ways of legitimizing capitalism ineffective, compel proponents of capitalism to ‘incorporate some of the values in whose name it was criticized’,¹⁵ or encourage capitalism to obscure its operations and avoid critique.¹⁶ Similarly, proponents of commercial television could rely on free-market arguments, particularly those in which public service television was criticized as a monopoly.¹⁷ But equally, they could respond to opponents by trying to incorporate elements that were valued in the critique of commercial television.

As Mainos-TV sought to legitimize its existence, international comparisons, including those to socialist television, provided support for its arguments. The debate over commercial television culminated in 1968, when YLE produced a critical report on commercial television in Finland. The report was commissioned by the Director General of YLE, Eino S. Repo (1965–1969), formerly a programme director at Mainos-TV, who introduced a new, ‘radical’ era at YLE with his ‘informative programming policy’. According to this policy, the goal of public service broadcasting was to offer viewers factual information that would help them form a correct and critical understanding of the world.

The YLE report was rather ominously titled *Pöllön anatomia* [*The anatomy of the owl*] in reference to Mainos-TV’s logo, which depicted a stylized owl. Its starting point was an international comparison of the ways in which television advertising was organized, evaluated on a scale of commercialism. According to this scale, the report placed the Finnish model in the most commercial category, where broadcasts include not only commercial advertisements but also commercial television programmes produced by private television companies. At the other end of the scale were models in which television advertising had no effect on programme production. The report especially criticized Mainos-TV’s own programme production, arguing that its ‘commercial background programmes’ (kaupalliset taustaohjelmat) were necessarily more commercial than public service broadcasting, as the

need to compete for viewers encouraged easy entertainment and repetitive programming. In its conclusion, the report recommended against banning television advertising (as it was needed to finance YLE), instead demanding that Mainos-TV should not be allowed to produce its own programming.¹⁸

The anatomy of the owl relied on international comparison to construct its critique of Mainos-TV, using examples from US television to illustrate the worst possible scenario. In its discussion of European television advertising, the report focused solely on Western Europe; socialist countries were not even included on the map that illustrated the current situation.¹⁹ Mainos-TV, in its published response entitled *Kaupallinen televisiotointa* [*Commercial television broadcasting*], referenced socialist Europe to argue for the acceptability of commercial television:

Television advertising also grows quickly in Eastern European countries, as problems of consumer society develop even there. The content of television commercials there has gradually become completely Western, and even Western advertisers may freely advertise their products, provided they are available in the country.²⁰

Here, Mainos-TV framed television advertising as a way of tackling the challenges typical of consumer society, which is equally relevant in the Eastern Europe as it is in the West. The claim about the reach of television advertising in socialist countries was not an exaggeration, as all socialist countries in Europe would eventually adopt television advertising.²¹ Mainos-TV further argued that the Finnish model of combining public service and commercial television, was ‘fit to use in all economic and social systems’, stressing that it was not a purely capitalist model.²² Thus, Mainos-TV used the situation in Eastern Europe as proof that commercials were an accepted part of television broadcasting across the ideological spectrum.

In response to criticism in *The anatomy of the owl* regarding the quality of its programming, Mainos-TV further argued that it had made a special effort to broadcast Eastern European films, noting that this effort had been officially recognized by Soviet television.

Mainos-TV also pointed out its limited ability to obtain programming because, unlike YLE, it was not able to join the Eurovision and Intervision networks.²³ However, Mainos-TV suggested that as a result of changing attitudes in several Intervision countries, the company had been invited to Intervision's Teleforum conference and several Eastern European countries were ready to negotiate collaborations with Mainos-TV.²⁴ In this way, Mainos-TV used its willingness to broadcast Eastern European programmes and develop relations with broadcasters in socialist countries as an argument against its critics, emphasizing its attempts to offer diverse programming. These relations between Mainos-TV and Eastern European television broadcasters would grow more intense and significant in the 1970s.

Domestic politics and cultural diplomacy: Mainos-TV's co-productions with socialist television

International contacts were important for Mainos-TV from the beginning, for instance, in the form of study visits to foreign television companies.²⁵ The early 1970s represented an era of intensified international collaboration, signalled by the establishment of a Foreign Service unit whose responsibilities included developing relations with foreign companies, international programme sales and co-productions, and participation in international competitions and festivals.²⁶ Mainos-TV hoped to find a new source of revenue from international sales, and it somewhat succeeded: While the company estimated that it had produced few programmes good enough for the international market by 1971, the value of its programme exports doubled from 1972 to 1973; by 1981, Mainos-TV boasted that its programmes were shown in almost every European country.²⁷ Raising Mainos-TV's international profile promised not only direct economic value but also prestige and a stronger domestic position. In this respect, co-productions with socialist television were useful.

As long as Mainos-TV operated on YLE's channels, its programming was subject to restrictions set by YLE's broadcasting license and Mainos-TV's contracts with YLE. Initially,

Mainos-TV was barred from broadcasting news and current affairs as well as religious and political programmes. Mainos-TV sought to lift these restrictions, campaigning for the right to broadcast news since 1974.²⁸ YLE broadcast the same evening news programmes simultaneously on both its channels, giving them an authoritative position. For Mainos-TV, challenging YLE's news 'monopoly' thus had great symbolic significance. Mainos-TV's campaign continued for several years, during which it lobbied politicians and tried to garner favourable public opinion towards news on commercial television.²⁹

Good relations with television in both the East and the West were necessary to convince decision makers of Mainos-TV's intention to produce balanced news programmes. A booklet outlining Mainos-TV's arguments emphasized that the company collaborated widely with television broadcasters in both Eastern Europe and the West, highlighting its co-operation agreements with television committees in nearly all the socialist countries of Europe. Accordingly, Mainos-TV argued that it played an important role in fostering communication between the East and the West, thus fulfilling the recommendations of the Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe.³⁰ The significance of its relations with Eastern European countries is also apparent in the memoirs of Mainos-TV's long-time CEO, Pentti Hanski (in office 1957–1984), who devoted most of his chapter on Mainos-TV's international relations to socialist countries.³¹ Hanski's narrative, which tends to cast YLE as the main antagonist opposite Mainos-TV, complained that YLE tried to discourage Soviet television from developing relations with Mainos-TV. To access Eastern European news footage, Hanski turned to Heinz Adameck, director of Fernsehen der DDR, who invited Mainos-TV to base a correspondent in East Berlin.³²

To develop its international co-productions, Mainos-TV hired author and former United Nations employee Juha Vakkuri as Head of International Productions in 1975. In his autobiography, Vakkuri describes how he understood his role in the long-term strategy of the

company: Mainos-TV wanted to obtain the right to broadcast all kinds of programmes, especially news. To gain the support of politicians on the left, Mainos-TV's leadership had decided to play the 'Moscow card': Mainos-TV would develop its relations with socialist countries in Europe so that they equalled or surpassed those of YLE. Vakkuri's task was to find programme ideas that could be realized with Eastern European partners.³³

Communication between Mainos-TV and socialist broadcasters was frequent: Vakkuri estimates he visited the company's Eastern European partners nearly every week. According to Vakkuri, Hanski was satisfied that Mainos-TV's co-production activities succeeded in building the company's reputation as a 'decent capitalist partner' in socialist Europe.³⁴

Vakkuri's memoirs emphasize the strategic value of Eastern European relations, suggesting that Mainos-TV's leadership considered them worthy of considerable investment.

Mainos-TV had started collaborating with its Eastern European partners even before its intensified efforts to build its international relations in the mid-1970s.³⁵ The company made its first set of Eastern European co-productions with television in the Soviet Union, starting with the quiz show *Naapurivisa* [*Neighbour quiz*], which it co-produced with Estonian television from 1966 to 1970 (two episodes annually). In the early 1970s, Mainos-TV developed co-operative relations with other partners in the Soviet Union, starting with a four-part documentary series, *Missä mantelipuut kukkivat* [*Where the almond trees bloom*], in 1970. Co-produced with the Television and Radio Committee of the USSR, this series introduces viewers to the history and culture of four cities in different parts of the country, combining Soviet archival film footage with Finnish narration. Mainos-TV went on to co-produce at least one documentary (often several) with its Soviet partners nearly every year until the mid-1980s. The Television and Radio Committee of the USSR was Mainos-TV's most frequent partner, but Mainos-TV also co-produced several documentaries with the Novosti Press Agency (APN) in 1976. Most of these co-produced programmes were

documentaries about Soviet society and culture, with themes ranging from energy policy and women's social position to notable authors, musicians and filmmakers.

In the mid-1970s, Mainos-TV began collaborating with television broadcasters in East-Central Europe. Its earliest co-production with East German television, entitled *Brecht Suomessa* [*Brecht in Finland*], was screened at a festival in Leipzig in 1975 and broadcast in Finland the following year.³⁶ Its first Czechoslovakian co-production was broadcast in 1976, followed by co-productions with Hungarian and Polish television in 1977. Mainos-TV's co-productions with socialist broadcasters were not just co-financing deals but also creative collaborations, in which professionals from both countries worked on the programmes together.³⁷ Whereas documentary co-productions with Mainos-TV's Soviet partners focused almost exclusively on Soviet culture and society, its co-productions with its East-Central European partners—although less numerous—covered more varied themes. For example, with Czechoslovakian television, Mainos-TV produced two programmes about artistic creativity and a five-part series about countries in southern Africa; with East German television, Mainos-TV collaborated on a programme about Sámi reindeer herders. In addition to documentaries, Mainos-TV and East-Central European broadcasters worked together on several entertainment programmes. In the late 1970s, these typically showcased tourist attractions in cities such as Warsaw, Berlin, Helsinki or Turku, with musical performances by singers from the co-producing countries (e.g. *Hyvää iltaa Helsinki – täällä Varsova* [*Good evening Helsinki – this is Warsaw*], 1977, and *Kohtauspaikkana Turku* [*Meeting place in Turku*], 1978). By the early 1980s, co-productions in entertainment became multilateral, starting with a six-part quiz show *12 kysymystä* [*12 questions*] co-produced with Czechoslovakian, East German and Hungarian television in 1980.

Within the political context of Finland, collaborating with partners in socialist Europe was valuable for Mainos-TV. After the Second World War, Finland pursued the politics of

neutrality; however, maintaining the trust of the neighbouring Soviet Union—with whom Finland entered into an Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in 1948—was a priority for Finnish foreign policy. Concern for real or imagined Soviet interests extended into Finnish domestic politics, influencing, for instance, the formation of government.³⁸ Moreover, the Finnish state and private companies had strong economic interests in trading with the Soviet Union.³⁹ In this context, even a commercial broadcaster like Mainos-TV was responsible for contributing to positive cultural relations between Finland and socialist Europe. In 1973, the parliamentary Television Programme Council emphasized that programmes about the ‘constructive development’ of Finnish–Soviet relations should help Finnish viewers understand the daily life of Soviet citizens.⁴⁰ The Council further decreed that television must present ‘different and even opposing worldviews’, without imposing a particular perspective on audiences.⁴¹ This emphasis on impartiality continued into the 1980s, when the Programme Council stressed that television should familiarize viewers with both ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ (i.e. socialist) culture. As an antidote to the supposed dominance of Anglo-American productions, the Council hoped that broadcasters would offer programming about Europe, especially Finland’s neighbours and the Soviet Union.⁴² Co-productions with socialist partners thus enabled Mainos-TV to create programming that met these requirements.

Co-productions can also be seen as a form of cultural diplomacy, which involves the use of culture to develop international relations in accordance with Finnish foreign policy. Writing about the Soviet film industry, Marsha Siefert concludes that when co-productions are seen as cultural diplomacy, the end product is not necessarily as important as the process; it is equally vital to negotiate various details in the production stages and simply keep the lines of communication open between international partners.⁴³ Similarly, for Mainos-TV, the process of co-producing programmes was significant in itself, enabling the company to

develop and maintain relations with Eastern European television broadcasters while assuring Finnish regulators that Mainos-TV was not exclusively oriented towards the West. This does not suggest, however, that the content and quality of the programmes were insignificant.

Co-productions as quality television

A typical criticism against Mainos-TV was that its output was too entertainment-oriented and lacked diversity, relying too heavily on serial programming.⁴⁴ Co-productions with its socialist partners helped diversify Mainos-TV's programming beyond the stereotypical commercial television offerings. The bulk of these co-productions consisted of documentaries on social and cultural topics. Many co-produced programmes focused on topics from the field of 'high culture', such as the artists and writers Vladimir Mayakovsky, Ilya Ehrenburg, Bertolt Brecht and Ilya Repin. These historical documentaries combined archival material from the partner country with interviews, newly filmed footage and Finnish voice-over narration. Although documentaries were not expected to draw large audiences, they were valued at Mainos-TV.⁴⁵ Juha Vakkuri has recalled how Mainos-TV's programme director, Leo Meller, praised *Majakovski* [Mayakovsky] (1982) with unusual warmth: 'Of international quality. Damn good! Congratulations!'⁴⁶ As a sign of the documentary's international success, Vakkuri points out that *Mayakovsky* 'was sold to both capitalist and socialist countries.'⁴⁷ These kinds of programmes were assigned value based on their themes and perceived quality rather than their viewing figures.

The reviews for *Brecht in Finland* offer an example of the critical reception of co-produced cultural documentaries. The documentary describes Brecht's experiences during his exile in Finland during the Second World War. Mainos-TV scheduled it as part of a themed evening broadcast, alongside a performance of Brecht's anti-fascist play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* by the Berliner Ensemble. Reviewers generally described *Brecht in Finland* as a successful co-production. The most influential television critic in Finland at the time was

Jukka Kajava, who wrote for the largest Finnish newspaper. Kajava, whose judgements reflected a combination of social radicalism and cultural elitism, was often critical of Mainos-TV.⁴⁸ In this case, Kajava commended *Brecht in Finland* for not repeating the self-congratulatory idea that Finland graciously offered Brecht refuge during the war as well as for showing how poorly the Finnish theatre world treated Brecht at a time when pro-German sentiment was strong. However, Kajava complained that the documentary, like other international co-productions, spent too much time showcasing Finnish scenery.⁴⁹ Newspapers on the left praised the documentary with more warmth. *Demari*, a Social Democratic publication, noted how peculiar it was that ‘our commercial Mainos-TV dedicate[d] an evening to Bertolt Brecht’ with ‘perfectly good programmes’, commending the combination of German archival material and Finnish interviews, resulting in a ‘seamless’ co-production.⁵⁰ *Kansan Uutiset*, which had ties with the Communist Party, concluded that *Brecht in Finland* belonged among ‘the fine MTV programmes that will maintain their value for a long time’, proving ‘the importance of international programme co-operation’.⁵¹ A theatre critic from the bourgeois *Uusi Suomi* newspaper was more critical of the documentary style, arguing that it should have given more room to interviews instead of archival material and views of contemporary Finland. However, even *Uusi Suomi* found no fault in the documentary’s critical interpretation of Finnish history during the Second World War, concluding that this ‘rare documentary’ succeeded in capturing the experience of exile in a way that felt alive rather than ‘museum-like’.⁵² Thus, while there were some reservations concerning the documentary style, particularly towards the touristic showcasing of Finnish scenery, many reviewers deemed the programme a serious and valuable effort. *Brecht in Finland* thus enabled Mainos-TV to gain appreciation from both the left-wing press and the cultural elite.

International co-operation allowed Mainos-TV to engage in some large-scale projects it otherwise may not have been able to produce, such as the ‘Africa series’ in 1978.⁵³ This

series, co-produced by a Finnish–Czechoslovakian team led by Ossi Wallius and Oldrich Vejvoda, covered society and everyday life in Zambia, Botswana and Lesotho in five half-hour episodes. The series was motivated by the struggles for independence in southern Africa. The concluding episode, ‘At the final border’, focused on the last territories still ruled by a white minority: South Africa, Rhodesia and Namibia. The Presidents of Zambia and Botswana and the Prime Minister of Lesotho were interviewed on how the liberation movements could best achieve their goals. The episode also visited the United Nations Institute for Namibia, which was training future administrators in preparation for the country’s independence. The series, filmed in several countries and featuring high profile interviewees, was an unusually demanding production for Mainos-TV. One explanation for the choice of this topic is that Juha Vakkuri once worked for the UN in Zambia and had maintained an interest in the continent’s political developments.⁵⁴ For Mainos-TV, which was limited in its right to broadcast current affairs, co-producing a topical series on the African decolonization process offered a way to develop its current affairs programming.

Co-operation with socialist television was also used to highlight Mainos-TV’s ambition to develop television entertainment, as in the case of *Variaatio varieteet* [*Variation variety*], a variety entertainment event co-organized with Czechoslovakian and Hungarian television in 1982. The event built on the idea of a shared European cultural tradition, promising to showcase a variety of television entertainment cultures. Each broadcaster involved prepared a programme on a shared theme (i.e. modern-day Romeo and Juliet) for a theatre performance in Helsinki, where they were judged in various categories, such as ‘best show’ and ‘best music’. The performances were later broadcast on Mainos-TV. According to producer Ere Kokkonen, Mainos-TV established the event ‘to continue and strengthen its collaboration with television companies in other countries’ and ‘to gain over time a grand event that allows creative makers of entertainment to showcase their abilities, even in fields

other than popular music.’⁵⁵ Kokkonen’s rationale reflects Mainos-TV’s wider concerns about television entertainment at the time. In its promotional material during the early 1970s, Mainos-TV had already begun stressing that it wanted to move away from pure ‘cavalcades of music’ to more varied forms of entertainment, lamenting the small pool of qualified writers and performers available for television entertainment and looking for ways to encourage new writers to enter the field.⁵⁶ Mainos-TV’s entertainment department complained that the low regard towards television led to a dearth in qualified scriptwriters, launching a scriptwriting competition in 1974 to remedy the situation.⁵⁷ Drawing inspiration from the tradition of variety entertainment, *Variation variety* was borne of a similar wish to diversify television entertainment. Initiatives such as these sought to position Mainos-TV as an ambitious company intent on taking television entertainment towards new horizons. Television magazine *Katso*, a key forum for the discussion of television in Finland, covered the first *Variation variety* event and deemed it worthy of continuation.⁵⁸ While *Katso*’s television critic found the Finnish and Czechoslovakian variations on *Romeo and Juliet* to be harmless light entertainment, he praised the winning Hungarian entry as a complex portrayal of the problems of contemporary society: full of sex, violence and symbolism.⁵⁹ *Variation variety* seems to have fulfilled Mainos-TV’s expectations, as the company went on to arrange two additional events. Czechoslovakian, Polish and East German television participated in the 1983 *Variation variety*, but the 1985 event was the largest, with participation from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Sweden.⁶⁰

In its annual reports, Mainos-TV described many documentaries it had produced with Eastern European partners as artistic successes, citing, for instance, the ‘high-quality ethnographic film’ *Linnunradan tuulet* [*The winds of the Milky Way*], the ‘important cultural film’ *Two authors of Soviet cinema*, and the ‘touching portrait’ *Ilja Ehrenburg – Eurooppalainen* [*Ilya Ehrenburg – a European*].⁶¹ Commenting on the international prizes

awarded to its programmes, the company's 1977 annual report stated that its best productions had 'clearly reached an international level'. The report estimated that increased international contacts through co-productions, screenings and competitions had 'given new ideas but, above all, belief in the professional craft of Finnish television: we are equal, in many cases even more careful and thorough, when it comes to content analysis.'⁶² The annual report thus represents Mainos-TV as a serious television broadcaster invested in quality productions at the international level.

The influence of socialist television culture on Mainos-TV

While contributing to Mainos-TV's catalogue of 'quality' television, these co-productions may have imparted some features that were typical of socialist television at the time. Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable have sought to define socialist television as a cultural form, discussing how it may have differed from television in liberal, democratic countries in the West. Mihelj and Huxtable argue that while the spatial organization of socialist television was familiar to viewers in the West—as both forms of television were considered domestic media—the temporal organization of socialist television was distinctive, reflecting the socialist interpretation of modernity.⁶³ Mihelj and Huxtable differentiate between 'socialist time', defined as 'any temporal practice that is distinctly socialist', and 'revolutionary time', which is based on the teleological notion that history is progressing towards communism.⁶⁴ Television could create a sense of a shared socialist time by scheduling that differentiated between work and leisure time and marked festive events apart from everyday routine in a way that was specific to socialist societies; however, the mundane quality of television makes it less suited for creating a sense of revolutionary time. Still, it is possible to connect 'the quotidian to the grand narrative of communist modernity and progress' within programme content, for instance, by celebrating technological achievements and state visits.⁶⁵

Adopting Mihelj and Huxtable's conceptualizations, I argue that Mainos-TV's co-productions were connected to socialist time in some cases, particularly when the broadcaster commemorated anniversaries that were significant to socialist Europe. One such event was the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1977. Mainos-TV presented its plans for the anniversary to the Television Programme Council for approval, listing the co-produced documentaries *Neuvostonaisia* [*Soviet women*] (1978) and *Two authors of Soviet cinema* as well as its plans to co-produce entertainment programmes on the upcoming Olympic games with Estonian television (it appears that these entertainment programmes were not completed). In addition, Mainos-TV broadcast other documentaries, films and concerts related to this theme.⁶⁶ Another event connecting Finnish television schedules to socialist Europe was the anniversary of the Finnish–Soviet Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, better known as the YYA Treaty. Although YLE carried the main responsibility for its commemoration, Mainos-TV participated by broadcasting the Finnish–Soviet co-production *25 vuotta ystävyyttä* [*25 years of friendship*], a documentary celebrating the past 25 years of the YYA Treaty, albeit not on the exact day of the anniversary.⁶⁷ These events served as a bridge between Mainos-TV and the temporalities of socialist television.

The notion of revolutionary time can be found in the content of documentary and entertainment programmes co-produced by Mainos-TV, which generally provided complimentary accounts of socialist societies. For instance, in *Haloo Helsinki, täällä Berliini* [*Hello Helsinki, this is Berlin*] (1978), Finnish hosts visit the home of an 'ordinary family' in Berlin to learn about the progressive characteristics of East German society, such as income-adjusted rent and women who 'naturally' earn the same salaries as their male counterparts. The socialist revolution itself is an affective theme in some of the co-produced programmes: Documentaries such as *Mayakovsky* and *Ilya Ehrenburg – a European* set their main characters against the backdrop of the revolutionary history of the Soviet Union. In

Mayakovsky, a Finnish narrator reflects on the importance of the revolution for the titular poet, while ‘The Internationale’ plays in the background and archival footage of revolutionaries fills the screen:

Everything changed. Revolution broke in Russia. The revolution saved Mayakovsky. It gave new power, peace of mind and meaning to life. The February Revolution was not enough for Mayakovsky. He wanted to overthrow everything old and frozen. He was afraid that small-minded bureaucrats who did not understand futurists would seize power in the government of culture. He went to the October Revolution as if it were his home.

The excitement of socialist revolution is a major theme in this documentary. In *Ilya Ehrenburg – a European*, however, the protagonist’s relationship to the October Revolution is more distant. Ehrenburg is portrayed as a cosmopolitan who spent much of his life travelling around the artistic circles of Western Europe. After the revolution, Ehrenburg travels back to Moscow because he appreciates what was happening there, unlike many Russian expatriates. The documentary builds an affective climax around the Stalinist industrialization period of the 1930s. Film footage of construction sites and pompous orchestral music are combined with a voice-over reading of Ehrenburg’s commentary on the atmosphere during the early years of collectivization and industrialization. Ehrenburg’s words are somewhat ambivalent: On the one hand, he observes how a strict plan structured the ensuing social changes, noting that people seemed to be ‘frozen’; on the other hand, he conveys how true enthusiasm characterized the era, describing the excitement of young people who believed that building giant factories would create paradise on earth. Despite Ehrenburg’s ambivalence, the images and music impart a sense of energy that sets this passage apart from the rest of the documentary.

Socialist revolution also served as a theme in a more contemporary documentary, *Soviet women*, which was co-produced by the family-programming department of Mainos-TV and the Television and Radio Committee of the USSR. Through its Finnish voice-over, the

programme portrays the Soviet Union as a model for gender equality, highlighting achievements such as its high number of female doctors and engineers as well as its robust childcare—which, viewers are told, is probably better organized here than in any other country. *Soviet women* offers a historical narrative of revolutionary change and constant progress. The voice-over (uniquely female, compared to Mainos-TV's other co-productions) explains that the position of Russian women was very poor at the turn of the century, before the first Constitution of the Soviet Union enacted complete equality. However, even with its impressive achievements, the documentary notes that there is still much to be done before Soviet society can fulfil its revolutionary ideals. Referencing the Soviet public debate regarding women's double workload, the narrator describes how the Soviet view has evolved: instead of seeing women mainly as workers, society must recognize the importance of women's 'biological' role as mothers. Consequently, the Soviet state has been developing ways to ease the burden of mechanical household tasks and enable women to concentrate on more creative work, such as childcare. *Soviet women* thus presents a historical account in which the socialist revolution paved the way for women's equality, demonstrating that the Soviet Union, while already exceptionally advanced, is constantly working towards an ideal communist society.

As these examples show, co-productions with socialist television were not just part of a strategic ploy to strengthen Mainos-TV's position in Finnish media; rather, they had a concrete effect on Mainos-TV's programming and the culture of commercial television in Finland, drawing on the themes and temporalities of the socialist cultures of Eastern Europe. This is not unique for co-productions: Mainos-TV's theatre department produced contemporary Soviet plays in the 1970s, just as YLE did on television.⁶⁸ Thus, Mainos-TV highlights an ideological complexity in the history of European commercial television: while state-socialist ideology may seem antithetical to the values of Western commercial television,

it was incorporable in a context that valued good relations with the socialist world, and the Soviet Union in particular, and where socialism had considerable popular appeal.

Conclusion

Collaboration between Mainos-TV and socialist television broadcasters was valuable in many ways. In terms of social capital, working with socialist broadcasters helped Mainos-TV gain useful connections. In the 1960s and 1970s, Mainos-TV was the only commercial television broadcaster across the Nordic countries, which set it apart from the close-knit network of Nordic public service broadcasters. Moreover, MTV—as Mainos-TV has been officially called since 1982—was not able to join the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) until 1993.⁶⁹ In this situation, collaboration between Mainos-TV and socialist broadcasters was mutually beneficial. As Mainos-TV worked to secure its position, it was important to build international contacts and enhance its credibility with international partners. Developing relations with socialist countries was especially valuable in the political and cultural contexts of Finland, where good relations with Eastern Europe were held in high esteem. International co-productions also helped Mainos-TV develop cultural capital in the form of diversified programming, showing that it was capable of offering programmes on social and cultural topics that differed from the stereotypical image of commercial television.

Mainos-TV's co-productions reveal a culture of commercial television that seems quite alien today. In the early decades of television, commercial television was in a defensive position, whereas in the 2000s, market principles have increasingly shaped Finnish media policy.⁷⁰ The contemporary MTV presents itself primarily as a medium for entertainment, as the broadcaster's stated mission is 'We entertain every Finn, regardless of space and time'.⁷¹ MTV now competes with a host of other commercial television broadcasters, but it remains the largest in Finland. As such, its long history adds value to the company, which MTV has commemorated by producing nostalgia series based on its popular entertainment programmes

of the past, such as song contests and beauty pageants (*Syksyn sävel -retro* [*Autumn melody retro*], 2011–2012; *Kaunis elämä* [*Beautiful life*] 2018). In contrast, MTV has little incentive to remember its co-productions with socialist broadcasters: they do not fit the current values of the company nor the narrative it tells about its history. As a result, some of the past complexities of commercial television are largely forgotten. Television scholar Heidi Keinonen has highlighted the diversity of early commercial television cultures in her study on Mainos-TV and TES-TV/Tesvisio (1956–1964) in the 1950s and early 1960s, noting how much their schedules differed from contemporary commercial television, as well as how varied and ambitious their programming was—characteristics that are relatively neglected in research on television history.⁷² The study of Mainos-TV's collaborations with its Eastern European partners shows that the company continued to pursue its policy of varied and ambitious programming into the 1970s and 1980s, reminding us of the complexities of commercial television history.

Recent research on Eastern European television has challenged the view of socialist television as a closed, purely propagandistic system, demonstrating how it borrowed ideas and imported programmes across the Iron Curtain.⁷³ Mainos-TV's co-productions draw attention to another aspect of socialist influences on European television networks: in some contexts, socialist broadcasters could be valuable partners for commercial television broadcasters in non-socialist countries as well. The collaboration between Mainos-TV and socialist television was not merely technical or financial but also creative, bringing themes and viewpoints from Eastern Europe to Mainos-TV's programme content. While the concrete negotiations required in this collaboration are beyond the scope of this article, further research could delve into the practical encounters between the production cultures of Mainos-TV and socialist television. We have yet to determine the similarities and differences between the

working cultures and programme ideals of Mainos-TV and socialist broadcasters, as well as how these were negotiated in the process of co-production.

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- ¹ Mainos-TV officially changed its name to ‘MTV’ in 1982, although the acronym was in use before then. As most of the material discussed in this article predates the name change, I mostly refer to the network as ‘Mainos-TV’. All translations of Finnish programme titles and citations are mine.
- ² J. Bignell and A. Fickers, ‘Introduction: Comparative European Perspectives on Television History’, in *A European Television History*, ed. J. Bignell and A. Fickers (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 20–1.
- ³ L. Lundgren and C. Evans, ‘Producing Global Media Memories: Media Events and the Power Dynamics of Transnational Television History’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 3 (2017): 252–70; L. Lundgren, ‘(Un)familiar Spaces of Television Production: The BBC’s Visit to the Soviet Union in 1956’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 37, no. 2 (2017): 315–32; D. Mustata, ‘Television in the Age of (Post) Communism: The Case of Romania’, *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40, no. 3 (2012): 131–40.
- ⁴ B. Skeggs and H. Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience, Value* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6–10.
- ⁵ L. Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). The argument presented in the article is based on the following material: published memoirs of key employees at Mainos-TV, Mainos-TV’s annual reports, Mainos-TV’s co-produced programmes archived at the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), promotional brochures published by Mainos-TV (held at the library of the University of Turku), and Finnish press articles about co-productions (e.g. Mainos-TV’s press-clippings archive held at KAVI as well as schedule listings and articles in the television magazine *Katso*).

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- ⁶ This expression is adapted from L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).
- ⁷ C. S. Browning, 'Coming Home or Moving Home? "Westernizing" Narratives in Finnish Foreign Policy and the Reinterpretation of Past Identities', *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 1 (2002): 47–72.
- ⁸ J. Kortti, *Modernisaatiomurroksen kaupalliset merkit: 60-luvun suomalainen televisiomainonta* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura, 2003); S. Elfving, *Taikalaatikko ja tunteiden tulkit: Televisio-ohjelmia ja esiintyjiä koskeva kirjoittelu suomalaisissa lehdistä 1960- ja 1970-luvuilla* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2008).
- ⁹ Television commercials were first seen in Finland during a television showcase at the Stockmann department store in Helsinki in 1954. The first television broadcaster in Finland, TES-TV, began broadcasting in 1956, funding its operations through commercials and sponsored programming. TES-TV's successor, Tesvisio (1959–1964), likewise depended on advertising for funding. See H. Keinonen, *Kamppailu yleisteleviosta. TES-TV:n, Mainos-TV:n ja Tesvision merkitykset suomalaisessa televisiokulttuurissa 1956–1964* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁰ C. Johnson and R. Turnock, 'From Start-Up to Consolidation: Institutions, Regions and Regulation over the History of ITV', in *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*, ed. C. Johnson and R. Turnock (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2005), 16.
- ¹¹ H. Hellman and H. Keinonen, 'Semi-Commercial or Semi-Public Service? Legitimation and Regulation of Commercial Television in Finland', *Comunicazioni sociali* 3 (2013): 51–2.
- ¹² H. Keinonen, *Kamppailu yleisteleviosta*, 105.
- ¹³ Ibid., 83; P. Hanski, *Pöllön siivin: MTV:n vuodet 1955–1984* (Helsinki: Otava, 2001), 166, 181–3, 195–204; R. Salokangas, *Aikansa oloinen: Yleisradion historia 1926–1996* (Helsinki: Yleisradio, 1996), 144–7.
- ¹⁴ Hanski, *Pöllön siivin*; J. Lyytinen, *Kun pöllö sai siivet: MTV:n uutisten historia* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2006).
- ¹⁵ L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 28.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 3–30.
- ¹⁷ E.g. Keinonen, *Kamppailu yleisteleviosta*, 93–6.
- ¹⁸ Y. Ahmavaara, N. B. Stormbom, and M. Tamminen, *Pöllön anatomia* (Helsinki: YLE, 1968).
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 8, 10–2.
- ²⁰ Mainos-TV, *Kaupallinen televisiotoiminta*, Report (1968), 8.
- ²¹ A. Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 173–8; S. Mihelj, 'Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe: Between Cold War Politics and Global Developments', in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, ed. T. Havens, A. Imre, and K. Lustyik (New York: Routledge, 2013), 12–4.

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- ²² Mainos-TV, *Kaupallinen televisiotoiminta*, 22.
- ²³ Eurovision and Intervision were the respective programme exchange networks of the European Broadcasting Union (whose membership consisted of public service broadcasting companies in non-socialist countries and Yugoslavia) and the International Radio and Television Organisation (including members in socialist countries as well as YLE in Finland).
- ²⁴ Mainos-TV, *Kaupallinen televisiotoiminta*, 15, 17.
- ²⁵ Hanski, *Pöllön siivin*.
- ²⁶ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1970*, Annual Report, 26; Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1980*, Annual Report, 63.
- ²⁷ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1971*, Annual Report, 35; Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1973*, Annual Report, 47; Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1981*, Annual Report, 76.
- ²⁸ H. Hellman and H. Keinonen, 'Semi-Commercial or Semi-Public Service', 51–2.
- ²⁹ P. Hanski, *Pöllön siivin*, 246–53; J. Lyytinen, *Kun pöllö sai siivet*, 42–120.
- ³⁰ Mainos-TV, *MTV Uutiset*, Brochure (1979).
- ³¹ P. Hanski, *Pöllön siivin*, 299–312.
- ³² Ibid., 303–4, 309–11.
- ³³ J. Vakkuri, *Olkilinna: Elämää kolmella mantereella* (Helsinki: Like, 2016), 298.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 321.
- ³⁵ Information about co-produced programmes has been compiled from the following sources: KAVI's Tenho database, Mainos-TV's annual reports, and schedule listings published in *Katso*.
- ³⁶ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1975*, Annual Report, 51.
- ³⁷ Cf. E. N. Redvall, 'Midsomer Murders in Copenhagen: The Transnational Production of Nordic Noir-Influenced UK Television Drama', *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 348.
- ³⁸ P. Alasuutari, *Toinen tasavalta: Suomi 1946–1994* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1996), 155–80.
- ³⁹ L. Lounasmeri, 'Through Rose or Blue and White Glasses? Decades of News about the Soviet Union in the Finnish Press', *Nordicom Review* 34, no. 1 (2013): 109, 113.
- ⁴⁰ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1973*, 19.
- ⁴¹ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1978*, Annual Report, 36.
- ⁴² MTV, *Toimintakertomus 1986*, Annual Report, 12–3.
- ⁴³ M. Siefert, 'Co-Producing Cold War Culture: East-West Film-Making and Cultural Diplomacy', in *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, ed. P. Romijn, G. Scott-Smith, and J. Segal (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 73–94.
- ⁴⁴ Y. Ahmavaara, N. B. Stormbom, and M. Tamminen, *Pöllön anatomia*; S. Elfving, *Taikalaatikko ja tunteiden tulkit*, 109–15.
- ⁴⁵ J. Vakkuri, *Olkilinna*, 323.

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- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 329.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., 329.
- ⁴⁸ S. Elfving, *Taikalaatikko ja tunteiden tulkit*, 293–304.
- ⁴⁹ J. Kajava, ‘Brechtin yksinäisyydestä Suomen markkinointiin’, *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 3, 1976.
- ⁵⁰ J. Turunen, ‘Tv-viikolta’, *Demari*, March 6, 1976.
- ⁵¹ H. Vuori, ‘Bertolt Brecht – läsnä!’, *Kansan Uutiset*, March 3, 1976.
- ⁵² K. Veltheim, ‘Maanpakolaisuuden muistot’, *Uusi Suomi*, March 4, 1976.
- ⁵³ Only the last episode of the series survives in a viewable format at KAVI. Information about programme-makers and the content of the other episodes was supplied by KAVI’s Tenho database.
- ⁵⁴ See J. Vakkuri, *Olkilinna*.
- ⁵⁵ Mainos-TV, *Varieteefestivaalit*, Brochure (1982).
- ⁵⁶ Mainos-TV, *Televisiomainonta 1972*, Brochure.
- ⁵⁷ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1973*, 37.
- ⁵⁸ S. Valjakka, ‘Varieteefestivaalit’, *Katso*, August 16, 1982, 3.
- ⁵⁹ S. Valjakka, ‘Minne Julia katosi?’, *Katso*, August 12, 1982, 17; S. Valjakka, ‘Meidän Romeo ja Julia’, *Katso*, September 20, 1982, 15; S. Valjakka, ‘Paras varietee’, *Katso*, October 18, 1982, 17.
- ⁶⁰ MTV, *Toimintakertomus 1983*, Annual Report; MTV, *Toimintakertomus 1985*, Annual Report.
- ⁶¹ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1978*, 30, 47; MTV, *Toimintakertomus 1985*, 33.
- ⁶² Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1977*, Annual Report, 48.
- ⁶³ S. Mihelj and S. Huxtable, ‘The Challenge of Flow: State Socialist Television Between Revolutionary Time and Everyday Time’, *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 3: 332–48.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 334.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 339.
- ⁶⁶ Mainos-TV, *Toimintakertomus 1977*, 38, 53.
- ⁶⁷ The film was not produced by Mainos-TV but by Finnish film studio Fennada-filmi and the documentary film studio in Leningrad.
- ⁶⁸ A. Koivunen, ‘Koko kansan teatteri: Televisioteatterit Suomessa 1960-luvulta 1980-luvulle’, in *Television viisi vuosikymmentä: Suomalainen televisio ja sen ohjelmat 1950-luvulta digiaikaan*, ed. Juhani Wiio (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2007), 256.
- ⁶⁹ Within the EBU, YLE opposed Mainos-TV’s membership. See S. Kiuru, *Valta ja viesti: Havaintojani Ylen johtamisesta* (Helsinki: Työväen Sivistysliitto, 2010), 94.
- ⁷⁰ H. Hellman, *Koko illan ilo? Kolmoskanava ja television kaupallistuminen Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2012), 389–91.
- ⁷¹ MTV, ‘MTV Info’, <https://www.mtv.fi/yritys> (accessed September 4, 2018).

⁷² Keinonen, *Kamppailu yleistelevisiosta*, 36.

⁷³ C. E. Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016); A. Imre, *TV Socialism*; S. Mihelj, 'Television Entertainment'.