

Title: Looking Sincere: Vladimir Sappak's Theory of Anti-Stalinist Subjectivity for the TV Era  
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**Abstract:**

In 1960-1961, Vladimir Sappak was the first Soviet critic to formulate a theory of Soviet television. As he tries to figure out the process of constructing telegenic personalities and plots, Sappak comes to believe that medium of television is somehow essentially, structurally anti-Stalinist. In Sappak's understanding, television has a "perfect pitch for truth" because it naturally makes those who are Stalinists appear insincere and disingenuous. Meanwhile, those who can operate within television's technologically-generated field of "trust" and "verification" are the kinds of people who know how to present themselves as possessing unspoken, but nevertheless evident depths of subjectivity. My paper places Sappak's tele-aesthetics within the context of the Thaw era's emphasis on "sincerity" as an utmost artistic value. I focus on how Sappak's aesthetic understandings come out of the contradictions of Stalin-era socialist realism and participate in the formation of late Soviet cultural intelligentsia sensibilities. I also argue that Sappak's focus on unspoken subjective depth contributed to the formation of the post-Stalinist censorship regime, which, while repressing overt discourse, enabled and privileged the presence of unspoken "depth" in official late Soviet cultural production— a transformation that eventually brought about lasting politico-ideological repercussions.