

The aim of the project is to examine reasons for the popularity of audiovisual texts depicting the period of late socialism in contemporary Russian media discourse. Various narratives set in the USSR are not the new phenomena themselves, nevertheless, in recent years the number of such audiovisual texts has increased markedly and gained a lot of popularity, generating more complex phenomenon that requires multi-faceted overview. Taking into account the specifics of the Russian media market and the processes going in the Russian society, this phenomenon is most often referred to what is usually called post-Soviet nostalgia.

In the project I intend to outline how the nostalgic discourse evolved from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the present day and to look closely at the texts representing the period of late socialism (1960s-1980s). This choice is due to the fact, that firstly, most of the creators and the target audience, as well as the ruling elites dominating the public discourse, belong to the generation who was born and raised in the post-war USSR. Thus, the image of the USSR proposed by popular culture is superimposed on their personal memories, experiences and stories of relatives. Secondly, the very period of late socialism occupies a special place in Soviet history. Culture and social life then was undergoing changes that A. Yurchak called “hypernormalization”: many Soviet citizens genuinely accepted fundamental values of the socialist state, nevertheless they routinely transgressed them and reinterpreted in various ways, filling forms of the rituals with new content. The project will be based on the hypothesis that nostalgia for any bygone era is primarily a reaction to the challenges of the present and its inadequacies that popular culture is trying to compensate for. I believe it is not a political phenomenon in itself; still, it can be exploitable by the ruling elites in an opportune historical moment. I want to suggest an approach to the problem that will be devoid of a generalized perception of the USSR and considering modern Russian culture in terms of binary opposition between obeying to the propaganda and resistant.

The research will consist of the analysis and interpretation of the body of audiovisual texts. In order to choose the most representative examples, I will start with a broader view of the problem and extracting the most important social and cultural contexts. At this stage it will be also essential to establish the main theoretical concepts (such as nostalgia, retrotopia, prosthetic memory, mediadiscourse) and to create clear periodization of the Soviet culture, determining the role of the late socialist period in shaping relevant cultural models and constructing collective memory. It is required in order to understand the characteristics of the world created in media and, for example, not to look for a distinct totalitarian cultural model in the texts about 1980s. Next, I am going to divide selected texts into four thematic groups: films and TV series depicting historical events, biographical and pseudobiographical narratives, stories of everyday life of ordinary people and adventures related with accidental travel in time. Each text will be analyzed using two approaches: in terms of constructing the media image of the world and in terms of their regards to the present times. In the first case, I will be focusing on the text itself, analyzing its narrative structure and the aspects that are supposed to immerse the viewer in the past times (such as the visual elements and the music used; characters’ personal conflicts and their relations with the state system and ideology; their resistance strategies and their attitude towards the capitalist world (or, using Yurchak's concept, to the “imaginary West”); biographical myths of cultural heroes of the era; the idea of the Great Empire; the colonies and Moscow’s spheres of influence; the war in Afghanistan; the memory of Stalinist repressions and the Great Patriotic War; faith and religion, etc. While in the second case I will concentrate on all contexts essential to each work: features of the media; characteristics of the target audience; the creators (authors, directors, producers of the film or the series) and their declared intentions; the reception (revealed e.g. in television ratings, reviews). Considering that, it will be easier to identify and interpret a personal or generalized perspective of the narrative and its deliberate references to current political and social events (or their deliberate omission), and to define the inadequacies of the contemporary world, which the nostalgic discourse is trying to compensate for.

The expected result of the project will be a comprehensive overview of one of the most visible and representative aspects of post-Soviet nostalgia in Russian media discourse. Fundamental analysis of popular audiovisual texts will help to understand the mechanisms of nostalgia functioning not only as an authoritarian message, but also as a society's strategy to deal with the challenges of the present day. I believe that it may not only fill the gap in existing research and initiate a discussion on this important topic, but also serve as an inspiration for comparative studies on similar phenomena in other post-socialist countries.