

Infotainment on Russian TV as a tool of desacralization of Soviet myths and creation of a myth about the future

El infoentretenimiento en la televisión rusa como medio para desacralizar los mitos soviéticos y crear un mito sobre el futuro

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Abstract

This paper deals with the process of incorporation of “infotainment” in the Russian television industry. Professional journalism is analyzed as a tool for the interpretation of facts, which have contributed to erode the myths of mass consciousness, which were formed by Soviet propaganda. According to the author, television news and other infotainment programs have affected socio-cultural processes in Russia; in particular, they have contributed to shaping the worldview of post-Soviet intellectuals, known as the “new intelligentsia”.

Resumen

Este artículo trata principalmente el proceso de incorporación del “infoentretenimiento” en la industria televisiva rusa. El periodismo profesional se considera como un medio para la interpretación de los hechos que ha contribuido a erosionar los mitos de la conciencia de masas configurados por la propaganda soviética. Según la hipótesis defendida por la autora, las noticias de televisión y otros programas de infoentretenimiento han influido notablemente en procesos socio-culturales en Rusia, en concreto, en la formación de la visión del mundo de los intelectuales post-soviéticos, también llamados la “nueva intelectualidad”.

Keywords

Russian television, infotainment, social myths, the discourse of intellectuals

Palabras clave

Televisión rusa, infoentretenimiento, mitos sociales, el discurso de los intelectuales

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1. Stating the problem

Since the Perestroika era, Russian liberal intellectuals have contributed to the media as journalists or experts, and have been seen as “the active public” (Khrenov, 2007) of authoritative resources (which in different years included *Ogoniok* magazine, the *Kommersant* newspaper, the radio station Echo of Moscow, the television channel NTV, and the RIA Novosti news agency, among others). Their critical attitude towards the authorities did not prevent the majority from voting for the President and Parliament in accordance with the plans of Vladimir Putin’s political team. However, it did create a atmosphere of debate, which until recently did not interfere with the elite’s power

It was in 2012, before the parliamentary elections, when everything began to change. At the time, the residents of big cities, above all, Moscow, dissatisfied with voting results, participated in demonstrations. A few months later, in the spring of 2013, the protests resumed due to the election of Vladimir Putin as president, and then again in the spring of 2014 in response to the appearance of Russian armed forces in Ukraine, as well as the annexation of Crimea. In this context, the leading media’s editorial boards underwent a process of transformation. The ownership of many media outlets regarded as liberal, like *Kommersant*, RIA Novosti, and the Lenta.ru website, changed hands, leading to the dismissal of senior managerial staff. Even at the media institutions that avoided firing notable employees, editorial policy has changed, there is now an increasingly positive and detailed coverage of the authorities’ actions, Russian national interests are highlighted, and foreigners are represented as enemies.

These late changes have destroyed the ideology that had been developed by liberal media for the past 25 years. The ideology which came to be called “Western” in Russia is a specific Russian hybrid of notions and images from European culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, from the Enlightenment to the culture of mass consumption. “In the eyes of Russian intellectuals, these ideas are considered through the concept of cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2006).

In its current form, the social group of Russian intellectuals sharing liberal “Western” values appeared after the dissolution of the USSR. The style of journalism which can be related to this group, labeled as “infotainment”, plays an important role in disseminating their ideas. In the author’s opinion, since the 1990s, this “infotainment” has contributed to Russian television overthrowing old myths and shaping new ones in their stead.

2. Theoretical and methodological basis

The term “infotainment” (Postman, 1985), created by merging the words “information” and “entertainment”, has been used in the USA since 1980s to refer to an approach in news presentation (Thussu, 2007) which allowed journalists to abandon official accounts and thoroughly considered comments in favor of “unofficial” communication and amusing details.

The appearance of infotainment in Russia is connected with the transition from the Soviet model of state-owned television to the American commercial model, all occurring after the dissolution of the USSR. Russian TV then had to face many problems which are familiar to European media researchers (Francia, 1998/99; Menduni, 1998), whose work, among others’, forms a part of this research’s theoretical foundation. However, the transformations of Russian TV in this period have particular features. Apart from the technological, economic, and cultural transformations, Russian mass-media also faced an ideology crisis. A commercialized model of TV broadcasting contradicted both communist and socialist ideals as well as the educational ideals of traditional Russian intellectuals.

The author’s hypothesis holds the following: during the 20 years from the mid-1990s to 2010s, infotainment developed in Russia not only as a commercially successful news format, but also as a special language; a tool used by new Russian intellectuals in order to update the social myths that Russian culture had been imbued with since the 19th century.

In Russia, an ironic attitude (Boym, 2002) towards the past and the official culture connected with communist ideology has become the main device of such communication. By using irony, infotainment in Russia has not only made news attractive for the mass audience, but also helped to desacralize (that is, to destroy) Soviet myths.

The author’s analysis of TV infotainment is based on the research of Linda Hutcheon (Hutcheon, 1998) and Katerina Clark (Clark, 1981), who singled out the story about the formation of a positive character as the basic narrative model of Soviet culture, and on Alexander Prokhorov’s (Prokhorov, 2007) study of the literature and cinema of the Thaw, where Soviet art is examined in terms of dealing with three major tropes: the trope of a hero; the trope of war; and the trope of a big family.

Russian infotainment, in the author’s opinion, uses the same tropes but presents them in a dialogical fashion. It is important to note Bakhtin’s speculation about serious genres, like traditional news, as “monologic”, dictating an integral and unchanging discourse about the world, while seriocomic genres, such as infotainment, are “dialogic” (Bakhtin, 1963).

In some cases, this was achieved by means of combining Soviet discourse and/or the discourse of intellectuals with postmodern ridicule of these discourses within the same news reports, and in others by means of storytelling, which allows to demonstrate how old Soviet myths are modernized using the example of ordinary people's life stories.

A discourse analysis of TV reports was used to determine the elements of myth that are responsible for the dialogical nature of discourse. This study also involved an analysis of the most significant projects of the NTV created using the method of infotainment. This choice has been determined by the specific role of the NTV in the late 1990s and 2010s. For several decades, it has been ranked among the three channels with the highest ratings. Despite the corporate conflicts of the late 1990s and the channel's rebranding, as well as the resignation of a number of professionals, for a longer time than other Russian channels it retained its orientation towards liberal ideas, and American and European cultures, in addition to helping to shape the image of Russia's modernized future. A documentary series by journalists Leonid Parfionov and Alexey Pivovarov, together with the NTV's end-of-the-day news broadcasts from 2010-2011, provided the main material for the author's analysis.

3. Results of the research

According to the type of analysis carried out, the reports were divided into two categories: those making sense of the myth about the past and those creating a myth about the future. The reports in which journalists were engaged in an ironical dialog with the past fell into the first category. The second type of reports involved storytelling about the people who live in accordance with the laws of this mythical future.

The socio-cultural crisis resulting from the dissolution of the USSR was at first perceived by intellectuals as a chance to acquire cultural domination. Some of them even made an attempt to join the power elite in building a capitalist society. Others, on the contrary, chose to preserve the ideas of the socialist state. With a considerable delay in the Russian political sphere, the division into "right" and "left" took shape.

However, the younger generation of intellectuals born in the USSR and brought up in the period of Brezhnev's "modernization" (Makarkin, 2011) were oriented not as much towards the cultural experience of Soviet intellectuals as towards the global culture of consumption, which was perceived as a

manifestation of freedom. The USA became a reference point for them, and infotainment became the language of a media myth about the future.

With regard to the term “intellectual”, which does not have a common definition in Russian social sciences, the interpretation of Konstantin Sokolov (Sokolov, 2007) will be used here. According to him, Russian intellectuals should be regarded as a heterogeneous social group, which comprises several concentric circles. To the “core” belong the few “ideologists” – the cultural elite creating mythologemes, forced to establish certain relations with the authorities, who search for consultants capable of influencing public opinion. The middle layer consists of “propagandists” – sociologists, historians, philosophers, journalists, and bohemians – who process these ideologemes into myths and pass them on to society with the help of the contemporary media. The periphery is formed by “executors” – doctors, teachers, lawyers, and engineers – who rank themselves among this subculture guided by social myths transmitted by TV.

Moving forward, we regard infotainment as a creation tool for a specific discourse and myths by means of which “propagandist” intellectuals communicate with “executor” intellectuals.

The main social myth addressed in this work is that about the uniqueness of Russian intellectuals and their specific cultural mission, which distinguishes them from their European counterparts. This myth already started to take shape in the 19th century and has undertaken some shifts in Soviet culture throughout the 20th century. The media, starting with magazines and newspapers, followed by films, radio, and TV, played an active role in this process. Therefore, by the 1970s, marked by social stagnation in the USSR and the development of the ideology of consumption, the public’s ideas about intellectuals had already been completely mythologized; a fact of reality (Barthes, 1970) gave way to ideas about it that were largely shaped by the film industry (Prokhorov, 2007). During this period, the values of the cosmopolitan intellectuals oriented towards the cultural standards of the Euro-Atlantic world and those of their traditionalist counterparts were not mutually opposed, but rather provided the dialogical nature of the culture. This was due to the fact that being an intellectual in the USSR was a peculiar form of protest against the idea of universal equality, both cultural and socioeconomic, which was degenerating into mediocrity. In these conditions, both cosmopolitanism and traditionalism worked equally well to distinguish oneself from the crowd.

3.1. Infotainment as a tool of desacralization of Soviet myths

The system of Soviet myths included both social myths about the past, like the triumph of the Revolution or victory in World War II, and social myths

about the future, like the victory of technical progress or of communism worldwide (Wright, 2005). By the end of the 1980s, the majority of these myths failed to inspire Russian society. By the early 1990s, all the myths were about the past even though people continued to see themselves as the heirs of Soviet culture, longing for it in a nostalgic way. Between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, infotainment in Russia was used to ridicule Soviet myths, stereotypes, and models of behavior.

One of the most popular authors and presenters of TV programs during this period was the journalist Leonid Parfionov (NTV), who presented the weekly news show “The Other Day” and the historical program “The Other Day. Our Era”, where he played with the official discourse of Soviet state leaders by superimposing his own image on archival photos so as to appear to be participating in the events himself. Both programs combined irony towards the Soviet past with nostalgia for it. Infotainment allowed the presentation of serious political, economic, and historical information through storytelling to be easily accessible for a mass audience. It attracted the viewers by means of scandalous, shocking, and criminal details of the past and the present.

In fact, not only the political myths of the Soviet era were subject to infotainment’s ironical laughter, but also cultural myths, particularly tailored to intellectuals-educators of the past. For instance, TV serials “Live Pushkin” (NTV, 1999) and “Gogol-Bird” (1 channel, 2009) desacralize the myths about great Russian writers. Their literary achievements were represented as a result of their tumultuous private lives or a consequence of mental illness. The mass audience, attracted by tabloid-like details, was intrigued and indignant at the same time. “Old school” intellectuals turned off their TVs in resentment. Neither group of viewers could understand the game contrived by the series’ authors. They were trying to show that the life and work of writers considered “literary classics” was more complicated and contradictory than it is taught in schools. In losing their sacredness, these writers become modern heroes free from Soviet ideological one-dimensionality.

The meaning of this game lay not in overthrowing the literary authority of Pushkin and Gogol but in giving the viewer an intellectual and emotional shaking, in purifying the discourse about culture from stock phrases and perceptual stereotypes. By emphasizing the eccentricities and pranks of these geniuses, the authors of these films represent great writers for the viewers as “their own people”. “And yet I wish I could drop in “The Yar” [name of a restaurant] for dinner together with Alexander Sergeich [Pushkin] if only for a quarter of an hour,” sang Bulat Okudzhava, an exponent of the spirit of Soviet intellectuals. Leonid Parfionov, the author of the above-mentioned films, eliminates the distance between himself, his audience, and the geniuses of the past. He can go dining with writers and he

actually does it with his signature technique – injecting himself as a documentary character into staged episodes of the film. The overthrown myth about a positive Soviet character is replaced by a myth about a new hero, who is cosmopolitan not only in geographic terms but also in those of historical time.

Such cultural provocation forms part of the dialog (Bakhtin, 1963) between propagandist intellectuals (journalists) and executive intellectuals (the enlightened public), the aim of which is to prevent the latter's worldview from stabilizing. By returning the spirit of counter-culture to Pushkin and Gogol and searching in revolts of the past for features akin to the present, Parfionov and his followers educate the viewers no better than intellectuals of the past. He does not, however, take a moral stand which appears to scare the 21st century commoner who is afraid of exhibiting bourgeois traits.

This fear, in the author's opinion, has penetrated into Russia together with contemporary western culture shaped at the meeting-point of bourgeois culture, with its traditional values and counterculture, which has been overthrowing traditions since the mid-20th century. Before the revolution of 1917, Russian culture did not have time to become bourgeois. Later on, the bourgeois attitudes and lifestyle of the party elite of the 1970-80s started to influence various strata of society. In those years, intellectuals attempted to oppose this process as counterculture. However, the political and economic cataclysms of the late 1980s and 1990s prevented both the establishment of bourgeoisie and the formation of counterculture from being completed. Bourgeois attitudes continue to be viewed by Russian intellectuals as a rejection of the idea of serving the people, which is still a meaningful part of the myth about a positive character.

Another basic Soviet narrative which laid the foundation of social mythology is the war myth. It has also undergone a desacralization process starting from the mid-1990s. On different channels, films were created using 20th-century newsreels, episodes from feature films, and including interviews with experts from various fields, as well as eyewitnesses. Their aim was to revise the Soviet version of 20th century history. During the first stage, it was neither a game nor a kind of entertainment. It was a manifestation of glasnost which accompanied the perestroika processes.

By the early 2000s, most of the terrifying facts of 20th century history had already been communicated to the public, but this did not destroy the Soviet myths about war and victory – neither the Civil War nor World War II. The mass consciousness continued to sacralize Stalin as the victor in the war against fascism, and the USSR as the savior of the world. Yearly public debates, held just before 9 May, confirm this.

A TV series of docudramas about the major battles of the Great Patriotic War (“Rzhev. An unknown battle of Georgy Zhukov” [NTV, 2009], “Moscow. Autumn of 1941” [NTV, 2009], “Brest. The bonded heroes” [NTV, 2010], among others) represented an interesting attempt at breaking stereotypes with the help of infotainment. The journalist Alexey Pivovarov who travels to the battlefields becomes the main character of these films. It is through his eyes that the audience is allowed to view the present and the past. Reconstructing the past by means of docudrama, the directors of these films investigate the events that war myths are based on. Military leaders and common soldiers played by actors argue with the heroes of Soviet films about war and dispute official memoirs, showing that life during the war was hard and that a discourse describing it should be dialogic and allow for irony, necessary for contemporary postmodern consciousness even in tragic historical episodes. In the authors’ opinion, cultural modernization is impossible without this dialog with the past. Precisely this is the main task of the “new intellectuals”, and infotainment serves this goal.

3.2. Infotainment as a tool for shaping the myth about the future

In the 2000s, wishing to be in keeping with the zeitgeist, while shaping its aims and values, the educated class in Russia had nothing to rely on but the tradition of Soviet intellectuals with their belief in progress and the bright future promised to them. To this end, each individual or community added elements of Western bourgeois culture or various forms of homebred traditionalism at their own pleasure, as well as various details from niche cultures (from yoga to Orthodox Christianity, from rock to folk music). The point was that it should be unobtrusive and without bombast, with a tinge of self-irony and playfulness. Infotainment, encompasses nowadays not only TV but also many other forms of cultural education – from museum exhibitions, concerts and theatre performances to public lectures and educational programs – and has become a convenient way of representing the cultural elite’s worldviews, shaping new ideology and new myths, and transmitting these to “executive intellectuals” in such forms that will not be rejected by contemporary consciousness as obtrusive and one-dimensional. Infotainment in present-day Russia is not a set of techniques but a style in which one part of society represents its notions of the future.

As an alternative to the heroes of the past, television has provided a new myth about heroes of the future, which deals with individual economic success. For example, in one of the episodes of “The Other Day” on NTV channel, entitled “Exodus Reversed” (released on 21.04.2002) the viewers were

offered a new form of internationalism based on business values. According to this model, belonging to a certain social group is related to the desire to make money.

In this case, there are “a Jew and a Chinaman”. Interestingly, the calculating Jew – a traditional character of Russian anecdotes – turns out to be a positive hero. He gives up his sacred dream about emigration to Israel (the title of the series refers to the biblical Exodus of the Jews from Egypt in search of the Promised Land) in favor of opening a successful enterprise doing business with China.

The account was full of associations and allusions, from historical (a reference to the first Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin) to political (a bull was called after the unpopular financial minister Chubais), through religious ones. Experiments with form, emphasis on personification, special effects, the use of drawn images, and animation were not an end in itself, but a means of engaging the viewers in a game, their involvement in which allowed them to feel as if they belonged to a circle of the elect few, who were able to understand all the meanings and connotations of a message. Infotainment’s irony allowed the viewer to soar above the mundane, having abandoned habitual clichés, playing with meanings and associations with the help of cutting and shaping a new discourse from the scraps of the old discourse of the intellectuals.

A crucial element of the Soviet intellectuals’ discourse is the progress myth (Lotman, 1999). In the 1990s, infotainment on TV was mainly directed at social and political progress and myths regarding them. Later on, political infotainment lost its elitism. Information programs on different channels contained plenty of fragments from films and videos, metaphoric details and minutiae, while journalism adopted paraphrases, allusions, and puns. All this was done, however, not in order to escape from Soviet myths but simply to hold the viewers’ attention.

In the 2000s, the myth about scientific and technological progress became an important part of modernizing myths, and infotainment took on the characteristics of sciencertainment, grounded on a series of attractions showing how technical progress can change everyday life. The progress myth forms part of the war narrative. In this case, it is a war not against a political enemy but rather against nature, tradition, and often human passivity.

The film “Life in a Day” authored by thousands of directors – YouTube users (24.07.2010, “Today”, NTV www.ntv.ru/novosti/199699/) is a good example of this. In a short report, the journalist manages to raise several important issues, each of which is worthy of scholarly research. Among other topics, it discusses the influence of social media on the “extension of public space” and mundane practices being transformed into art.

The report's prime mover, the director Kevin Macdonald, says the following about his project: "It isn't a film, it's a poem. The tiny videos on YouTube can be read as a chronicle of this planet, which is being written every minute."

The journalist's walk through the city together with the director, a traditional infotainment device, can also be perceived as part of the would-be film. The director asks the participants of the project three simple questions: What do you love? What do you fear? What can make you laugh? The journalist asked people in the street the same questions, but the majority of them refused to answer. The journalist's behavior serves as an example of a progressive person's response: he shows the viewers how he brushes his teeth in the bathroom, makes coffee, or rides in a taxi. In fact, this report is also a myth about the making of a positive character, or rather a multitude of characters who are sending in their footage for the film. Their readiness to extend the public space will earn them fame: "The film will be shown at a festival in America in January, and afterwards will appear on YouTube. Authors of the 20 most outstanding videos will receive personal invitations to the festival in Utah."

Infotainment techniques, such as clip cutting in this case, are needed to remove conservative viewers' fear of new technologies by means of a game, to help them develop an interest in the ideas of progress. The journalist, acting in keeping with the model suggested by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1970), idealizes a new form (here, a new principle of film-making), understanding it as a way of creating a desirable future. By following the path of a "new creator" and making a film about himself, the author fills his account not with the facts of reality but with wishful thinking.

Here we see both a new myth about a positive character and a new myth about a war against a person's fears in the face of the new information-oriented reality. There is even a new version of the "big family" myth. This family, though, is no longer the Soviet people as it was in the art of Socialist Realism (Prokhorov, 2007), but a community of social network users.

The "big family" myth should be given special consideration. Whereas myths about a positive character and about war in post-Soviet culture found some kind of replacement rather soon, the "big Soviet family" myth was difficult to adapt to the new culture. Paternalism, which lays the foundation of the myth about the Soviet family, contradicted the values of individual success and personal responsibility, the intellectuals' perception of the people as their "younger brother[s]," and the new ideas about the culture of "individual worlds."

One of the ways this myth was transformed lies in the religious pursuits of post-Soviet culture. The positive character was thus found in the person of a priest, his war was the war against the sinful world order, and his congregation became his

big family. This version was in keeping with the ideas of 19th-century intellectuals, who felt their position to be close to that of priesthood (Lotman, 1999).

An example of such a story can be found in an account about a Polish priest who listened to the confessions of prostitutes not in a church but directly on the highway (NTV, 08.01.2011. "Today", 19.12 <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/216135/>). The theme itself –the salvation of fallen women– is traditional in the culture of the Enlightenment. However, according to the Russian tradition, a priest must wear the soutane and behave in a reserved way, he can only meet criminals and prostitutes at church, where, having repented, they come to pray for forgiveness of their sins. The behavior of the character of the report breaks these stereotypes:

Polish priest Marek Poryzala, hiding his soutane under a leather jacket, is once again heading for the highway in search of women of easy virtue. Preaching, hearing confessions, giving a lift to those who [have] lost their way, Father Marek is ready to risk his life and engage in a conflict with pimps.

This footage surely seems scandalous: a Catholic priest leaves the highway, drives towards a girl on the side of the road and invites her to get into his car. Suspicions deepen as one examines the driver closely. He looks like a typical truck driver, an aficionado of booze and easy women. But judging from the conversation, it is not her body that the prostitute lays bare in his car, but her soul.

Prostitutes' stories told by the priest also refute popular opinions. They turn out not to be sinful monsters but victims of circumstances: they miss their children left in their home towns, cannot bring themselves to tell their husbands about how they earn money for their family. The hero of the report confirms this observation both as a priest and as a researcher:

Marek Poryzala, priest: "I offer rosaries to these girls, and they always choose the white ones. This means that deep inside they long for purity and innocence."

I needed to collect material for a book, so I got into my car and drove to the highway nearest to the church. At first, I was afraid; then the girls got used to me. I finished the book, but it would have been dishonorable to leave them then, as if I had exploited them like everyone else.

The character's extraordinariness is highlighted by off-screen commentary, interview fragments, and details of visual narrative.

Off-screen commentary:

The car is both a mobile church and a food store. Here's only a part of its contents. The curate asked us not to show his number plate. Polish pimps hate him, once they chased him in two cars, he barely escaped. His goal is at least to show prostitutes that somebody cares for them; two of his protégées have already promised him to give up this trade.

Marek Poryzala, priest: "Here is my biretta, here are sandwiches for the girls – monks made them. And here is my garb and cross. If a prostitute wants to confess, I put them on and hear confession right here on the roadside. I also bring water for exorcism and salt for the same purpose."

Having brought the problem out into the open and illustrated it with a vivid example, the journalist draws a conclusion which is typical of the discourse of intellectuals: he shows the hero as someone who stands up against the authorities, specifically to European rules, which is not conducive to revealing the problem, as this off-screen commentary shows: "European legislation forbids Polish authorities to collect statistics on prostitutes, that's why it is unknown how many of them there are in the country. Euro-2012 will turn Poland and Ukraine into a world center of prostitution."

When a sermon is not enough, and legal or social help is required, Father Marek sends women to La Strada Foundation that fights against human trafficking. Phone operators receive calls from female victims seven days a week. A La Strada Foundation employee stated "Every Wednesday we consult in Russian. Nearly half of the appeals for help come from women from Belarus and Ukraine. Russia is mainly represented by those from the Kaliningrad Oblast."

At first sight, this exciting report (however traditional it may seem) should not be regarded as infotainment. However the character's unusualness, the fact that prostitution is a taboo subject, the opportunity to peep "behind the scenes" of a priest's work with his congregation, details of his everyday life, water and salt for exorcism (elements of the sacred, next to sandwiches for the women), attributes of the profane, car chases from the world of feature films – all this in one account becomes a part of a postmodernist game destroying stereotypes and not imposing a single correct conclusion.

Intertwining sacred motives and profane details, the journalist in this report, in the author's opinion, follows the scheme of desacralisation of a myth

described by Mircea Eliade. Instead of the sacrament of confession or at least a confirmation of a sacred image of a priest sacrificing himself for his flock, the journalist offers viewers an example of the path of a “positive character” of the new type. It is the shift from the role of a researcher and writer to the role of a stereotype destroyer who activates the civic, if not political, energy of the audience for a fight for new images of the future. These images are constructed on the same mythological basis as the Soviet myths about a positive character, war, and a big family. However, the positive character is a Catholic priest who is at war neither with military opponents nor with the forces of nature, but with ideological enemies – officials and pimps. Whereas for prostitutes he positions himself as the father of a “big family,” ready to protect them from the unfair world order for the sake of their passage to a better future.

This variant of the myth is a sideshow for the modern secularized consciousness. Salvation through religion for an educated Russian spectator is a reference to the 19th century, to Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s “Crime and Punishment”, rather than a part of an image of the future. The loss of the big family myth would instead be compensated by social communication through the Internet. Web communities collecting money for costly operations, dispensing advice about upbringing children, discussing cultural and political events form “big families” around “paterfamilias” – bloggers who have over a thousand subscribers and, thus, the power to moderate the communication processes and shape cultural trends. In the author’s opinion, these bloggers use infotainment techniques, too. Regrettably, this is a topic for another research.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of Russian TV news and documentaries that have been created with infotainment methods has allowed the author to suggest a typology of social myths that appear most relevant for post-Soviet culture. Some of them concern Russia’s past, while others deal with its image of the future.

The narrative structure of infotainment reports on Russian TV is most often based on traditional myths of Soviet culture: about a “positive character”, war, “progress”, and the “big family.” Their old interpretation is desacralized by means of infotainment’s ironic devices, while the new one is constructed with the help of the same devices but without sacredness, on the basis of seriocomic dialogism.

For Russian intellectuals who came to work for TV after the Perestroika era, the method of infotainment became not only a means of attracting mass

audiences and increasing the commercial value of the news but also presenting life stories in a seriocomic form. Infotainment journalists help their viewers to develop a dialogic worldview, preventing their ideas about the world from stabilizing. In this way, infotainment maintains a state of reflexivity – the features distinguishing intellectuals since the existence of this stratum.

The intensiveness of the dialogue around a type of social myth described here has changed according to the political situation in Russia. Thus, at the beginning of Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (2008), the myth "about progress" gained particular urgency, as it was used for the media promotion of the Skolkovo Naukograd project; whereas the World War II anniversaries actualized "the war myth" from 2009-2010. The popularity of the infotainment method among Russian TV journalists has decreased considerably since 2010. Dialogism in Russian journalism (above all seriocomic dialogism) has come to be perceived as politically incorrect. Leonid Parfionov, fired from the NTV back in 2004 (<http://izvestia.ru/news/290613>), announced at a professional award ceremony in 2010 a crisis in Russian journalism (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9nvQhUBA0k>).

In 2014, infotainment on Russian TV is used solely as a means of boosting ratings and attracting viewers with the help of criminal or scandalous details. The modernization of social myths has ceased to be directed to improve the acceptance of liberal values and Western culture. The Russian information community is witnessing a crisis in dialogism, a return to monological propaganda methods.

As it is a universal method of presenting information, infotainment is not likely to fully disappear from Russia, although it will be a different kind of infotainment. The period of desacralization of Soviet myths with its help, as described in this article, is apparently over.

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