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

Abstract

This paper analyzes the stages of adaptation of "infotainment" to the specifics of the Russian television industry. The paper discusses methods of professional journalism as a tool for the interpretation of the facts and the overthrowing of the myths of mass consciousness, which were formed by Soviet propaganda. According to the author, television news and other infotainment programs have affected the socio-cultural processes in Russian society, such as the shaping of the worldview of post-Soviet intellectuals, who are called "new intelligentsia".

**Key words**

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

**Stating the problem**

Since the perestroika Russian liberal intellectuals have contributed to the media as journalists or experts, they have been seen as “the active public” (Khrenov, 2007) of authoritative resources (which in different years included *Ogoniok* magazine, *Kommersant* newspaper, Echo of Moscow radio station, NTV television channel, RIA Novosti news agency, and others). The critical attitude of this part of Russian society 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 discussion background, which till recently did not get in the way of the power elite.

Everything started to change in 2012, before parliamentary elections. Then residents of big cities (first of all, Moscow), dissatisfied with the course of voting, participated in demonstrations. A few months later (in spring 2013) the protests renewed in connection with the election of Vladimir Putin as president, then again a year later (in spring 2014) in response to the appearance of Russian armed forces in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Against this background there started a reorganization of the leading media’s editorial boards. Change of proprietors and dismissal of senior managerial staff befell many media outlets which used to be considered liberal, such as *Kommersant*, RIA Novosti, Lenta.ru website, etc. Even in those media institutions which avoided firing notable employees, the editors’ policy has changed, with increasingly positive and detailed coverage of the authorities’ actions, Russian national interests foregrounded, and foreigners represented as enemies.

This has destroyed the ideology which had been developed by liberal media for the previous 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 19-20th centuries (from the Enlightenment to the culture of mass consumption). Transferred onto Russian soil, these ideas are reconsidered by intellectuals 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 has been labeled “infotainment” plays an important role in spreading their ideas. In our opinion, with its help since the 1990s, Russian television has been overthrowing old myths and shaping new ones instead.

**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 commercialized model, which took place after the dissolution of the USSR. Russian TV then came to face many problems which are familiar to European media researchers (Francia, 1998/99; Menduni, 1998), whose work among others forms a part of our research’s theoretical foundation. However, the transformations of Russian TV in this period have their specifics. Apart from technological, economic, and cultural transformations, Russian mass-media had to face a crisis of ideology. A commercialized model of TV broadcasting contradicted both communist and socialist ideas and the educational ideals of Russian intellectuals.

Our hypothesis consists of the following: we suggest that during the twenty years from the mid-1990s to 2010s infotainment in Russia developed, not only as a commercially successful news format. It became a special language with the help of which Russian intellectuals tried to modernize the social myths that Russian culture had been imbued with since 19th century.

In Russia, an ironical 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 assisted the desacralisation (that is, destruction) of Soviet myths.

Our analysis of TV infotainment rests upon 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. We also rely 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 our opinion, uses the same tropes, but presents them in a dialogical fashion. Of particular importance for the present study is Bakhtin’s thought about serious genres (an example whereof is traditional news) as “monologic”, dictating an integral and unchanging discourse about the world, while seriocomic genres (infotainment) are “dialogic” (Bakhtin, 1963).

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

While researching the empiric material we join an analysis of discourse with an analysis of TV reports, which allows us to determine the elements of myth that are responsible for the dialogical nature of discourse.

In the course of our research we analyzed the most significant projects of the NTV channel which were created using the method of infotainment. This choice has been determined by the specific role of NTV channel in the late 1990s and 2010s. For several decades it has charted among the three channels with the highest ratings. Despite 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 orientation towards liberal ideas, American and European cultures, and helped shape the image of Russia’s modernized future.

A documentary series authored by journalists Leonid Parfionov and Alexey Pivovarov, together with NTV end-of-the-day news broadcasts from the years 2010-2011, provided the main material for our analysis.

***Results of the research***

We have grouped reports under the type of analysis, which were created by means of infotainment method into two blocks: those making sense of the myth about the past and those creating a myth about the future. Into the first category fell the materials where the journalist was engaged in an ironical dialog with the past. The second type of reports involved storytelling about the people who live in accordance with the laws of the future.

The socio-cultural crisis resulting from the dissolution of the USSR was at first perceived by the 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 so 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 mediamyth about the future.

Addressing the term “intellectuals”, which does not have a common definition in Russian social sciences, we will be following the interpretation of Konstantin Sokolov (Sokolov, 2007). 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, bohemians), who process these ideologemes into myths and hand them on to society with the help of contemporary media. The periphery is formed by “executors” (doctors, teachers, lawyers, engineers), who rank themselves among this subculture guided by social myths transmitted by TV.

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

The main social myth the present research is occupied with is the myth about the uniqueness of Russian intellectuals and their specific cultural mission, which distinguishes them from their European counterparts. This myth started to take shape already in the 19th century and continued transforming in Soviet culture throughout the 20th century. The media (first magazines and newspapers, then cinema, radio, and TV) took an active part in this process. Owing to this, by the 1970s (the period of social stagnation in the USSR and 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 cinema (Prokhorov, 2007). During this period the values of the cosmopolitan part of the intellectuals oriented towards the cultural standards of the Euro-Atlantic world, and those of their traditionalist counterpart were not mutually opposed, and 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 (cultural as well as material), which was degenerating into mediocrity. In these conditions both cosmopolitanism and traditionalism worked equally well to distinguish oneself from the crowd.

*Infotainment as a tool of desacralization of Soviet myths*

The system of Soviet myths included both social myths about the past (the victory of the revolution, the victory in the Second World War) and social myths about the future (the victory of technical progress, the victory of communism all around the world) (Wright, 2005). By the end of the 1980s the majority of these myths failed to inspire Russian society. By the early 1990s they had all turned into myths about the past. However, people continued to see themselves as heirs of Soviet culture, to long for it in a nostalgic way. In the period between the mid-1990s and early 2000s infotainment in Russia came to be used to ridicule Soviet myths, stereotypes, and models of behavior.

One of the most popular authors and presenters of TV programs in this period was the journalist Leonid Parfionov (NTV channel). He presented the weekly news show “The Other Day” and the historical program “The Other Day. Our Era”, where he played with the official chronicle of Soviet state leaders, mounting his own image against archival shots so as to appear to be participating in the events. Both program combined irony towards the Soviet past with nostalgia for it. Infotainment allowed the presentation of serious political, economic, 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 became subject to infotainment’s ironical laughter, but also cultural myths, particularly tailored for 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 the writer’s tumultuous private life or a consequence of mental illness. The mass audience, attracted by tabloid-worth 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 serials’ authors. They were trying to show that the life and work of the writers considered “literary classics” was more complicated and contradictory than it is taught at school. 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 perceptional stereotypes. By emphasizing the eccentricities and pranks of people of genius 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 (a documentary character) into the texture of staged episodes of the film. The overthrown myth about a Soviet positive 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 is a 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, by searching in revolts of the past for features akin to the present, Parfionov and his followers educate the viewers no worse than intellectuals of the past, but without moralizing which appears to scare a person from the 21st century, who is afraid of exhibiting bourgeois traits.

This fear, in our opinion, has come to 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 the 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 desacralization starting from the mid-1990s. On different channels, films were created using twentieth-century newsreels, episodes from feature films, and including interviews with experts from various fields as well as with eyewitnesses. They aimed at revision of 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 early 2000s most of the terrifying facts of the 20th-century history had already been communicated to the public, but this did not destroy the Soviet myths about war (both the Russian civil war and the Second World War) and victory. The mass consciousness continued to sacralize Stalin as the victor in the war on fascism and the USSR as the savior of the world. Yearly public debates held just before 9 May have been testifying to this.

A serial of TV 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], and others) represented an interesting attempt at breaking stereotypes with the help of infotainment. The journalist Alexey Pivovarov who travels to the battle fields becomes the main character of these films. It is through his eyes that the audience are allowed to view the present and the past. Reconstructing the past by means of docudrama, the authors of the films investigate the events that myths of war are based on. Military leaders and common soldiers played by actors argue with the heroes of Soviet films about war and with official memoirs, showing that life during the war was hard and a discourse describing it should be dialogic and allow for irony, without which the contemporary postmodern consciousness can’t take in even tragic historical episodes. Without this dialog with the past, in the authors’ opinion, cultural modernization is impossible. Precisely this is the main task of the “new intellectuals”, and infotainment serves this goal.

*Infotainment as a tool of shaping the myth about future*

In the 2000s, wishing to be in keeping with the zeitgeist, while shaping its aims and values the educated class in Russia could rely on nothing 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 home-bred 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 programmes) and has become a convenient way of representing the cultural elite’s worldviews, of shaping new ideology and new myths, and of transmitting those to “executive intellectuals” in such forms which will not be rejected by contemporary consciousness as obtrusive and one-dimensional. Infotainment in Russia nowadays is not a set of techniques but a style in which one part of the 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, aspiring to personal financial success. For example in one of the series of “The Other Day” on NTV channel, titled “Exodus Reversed” (released on 21.04.2002) the viewers were offered a new form of internationalism based on business values. Within this model a person belongs with those it is convenient to make money with. In this case, these are “a Jew and a Chinese”. Interestingly, a 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 Jews from Egypt in search of the Promised Land) in favor of opening a successful business enterprise dealing with China.

The account was full of associations and allusions, from historical (a reference to the first Soviet cosmonaut Yurii Gagarin) and political (a bull was called after the unpopular financial minister Chubais) to religious. 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 themselves as 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 everyday 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 programmes on different channels abounded in fragments from films and videos, metaphoric details and minutiae, while journalism adopted paraphrase, allusion, and pun. 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 sciencetainment. Its basis was formed by a set of attractions showing how technical progress can change everyday life. The progress myth is a part of the war narrative. In this case it is a war not against a political enemy but against nature, tradition, and often against human passivity.

For example we will quote a report about shooting the film titled “Life in a Day” authored by thousands of directors – YouTube users (24.07.2010, “Today”, NTV <www.ntv.ru/novosti/199699/>). In a short report the journalist manages to raise several important issues, each of which is worthy of scholarly research. Among others, it concerns the influence of social media on the “extension of public space”, and everyday practices being transformed into art.

The main character of the report, the director Kevin Macdonald, says about his project: “It isn’t a film, it’s a poem”. “YouTube, it’s tiny videos, it’s already 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 a 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 asks people in the street the same questions, but the majority of them wouldn’t 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 their footage for the film. Their readiness to extend public space will be rewarded with fame: “The film will be shown at a festival in America in January, and afterwards will appear on Youtube. Authors of the twenty 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 to create a desirable future. By following the path of a “new creator” 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 on 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 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 lay 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 necessarily wear the frock and behave in a reserved way, he can only meet criminals and prostitutes in church, where they, having repented, 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 frock underneath a leather jacket, once again is 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”.

“These shots surely look scandalous: a Catholic priest leaves the highway, drives towards a girl at the side of the road and offers her to come into the car. Suspicions deepen as one examines the driver closely. He looks a typical truck driver, a lover of booze and easy women. But judging from the conversation, it’s not her body a 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 which way they earn money for the 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 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 the car and went 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 holy father 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 business”.

Marek Poryzala, priest: “Here is my head-dress, 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 into the open and illustrated it with a vivid example, the journalist draws a conclusion which is typical for intellectuals’ discourse: he shows the hero as opposed to the authorities, specifically to the European law which is not conducive to revealing the problem.

Off-screen commentary: “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. Seven days a week phone operators receive calls from female victims. A La Strada Foundation employee stated “Every Wednesday we consult in Russian. Women from Belarus and Ukraine form nearly a half of all appeals. Russia is mainly represented by those from Kaliningrad Oblast”.

At first sight this exciting, however traditionally made, report should not be considered as infotainment. However the character’s unusualness, the topic being a taboo, an 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, beside sandwiches for the women – attributes of the profane, car chases from the world of mass cinema — all this in one account turns into 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 our 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 the viewers an example of the path of a “positive character” of the new type. It is the movement 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, about war, and about 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 a 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 rather a side-show 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 children’s upbringing, discussing cultural and political events form “big families” around “patresfamilias” — bloggers who have over a thousand subscribers and, thus, the power to moderate the communication processes and shape cultural trends. In our opinion, these bloggers use infotainment techniques, too. Regrettably, this is a topic for another research.

**Conclusions**

The analysis of Russian TV news and documentaries that have been created with infotainment methods has allowed us 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 foundation of narrative structure of infotainment reports on Russian TV is most often laid by traditional myths of Soviet culture: about “positive character”, about war, the “progress”, and about 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 on TV after perestroika, the method of infotainment became not only a means of attracting mass audience and increasing the commercial value of the news. Presenting life stories in a seriocomic form, infotainment journalists help their viewers to develop a dialogic worldview which would prevent their ideas about the world from stabilizing. In this way, infotainment maintains the state of reflexivity — the features distinguishing intellectuals for the whole time of the existence of this stratum.

The intensiveness of the dialogue around a type of social myth we have described 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 media promotion of the Skolkovo Naukograd project. Whereas the Second World War anniversaries actualized “the war myth” in 2009-2010. The popularity of the infotainment method among Russian TV journalists has decreased considerably since 2010. Dialogism in Russian journalism (all the more seriocomic dialogism) has come to be perceived as politically incorrect. Leonid Parfionov, fired from NTV back in 2004 (http://izvestia.ru/news/290613), at a professional award ceremony in 2010 announced a crisis of Russian journalism (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9nvQhUBA0k) .

In 2014 infotainment on Russian TV is used solely as a means of boosting the ratings, attracting viewers with the help of criminal or scandalous details. The modernization of social myths has ceased to be directed at acceptance of liberal values and Western culture. The Russian information field witnesses a crisis of 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, but 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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