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HELLO, LENIN?

NOSTALGIA ON POST-SOVIET TELEVISION IN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

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Abstract: After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Soviet television looked old-fashioned and seemed redundant, with the emerging post-Soviet televisual cultures turning their gazes to global sources of inspiration. The next decade affected Russia and Ukraine in very different ways. In Russia brief exposure to what was seen as “cheap mass-culture” left TV viewers and producers disillusioned. With the change of attitude towards Western TV, the ideas about Soviet TV changed, too. From a grey and unexciting model Soviet TV had become a shining example of “high quality” and nostalgia-driven content set in for the next few years. In Ukraine, where no domestic TV had existed as such prior to 1991 and where Soviet TV was rapidly fading into the past (and some-one else’s past, too), a decade of experimenting with programming had left the TV producers much more open to global television formats and Western ideas, developing programmes very different than the Russian ones.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, post-Soviet, global, Soviet, KVN, Pugacheva, Kobzon, Vakarchuk

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, its demise was greeted as an end of an era. It echoed the mood created by Frances Fukuyama with his ‘End of History’.¹ The Soviet ideology had proved redundant, and by association – Soviet popular culture, and Soviet television programming as its constituent parts, were ready to be stricken off the list of practices to be revisited ever again. Fifteen new states emerged from the rubble of Soviet history ready to start out on their individual paths of political and cultural development.

Russia, as a central hub of the old empire’s ideology and culture, was ready to shake off the past and embrace new realities. These included Western values of democracy, market economy and consumerism, as well as digestible cultural models. By the end of 1990s, however, the economic hardships brought on corporatization which in effect meant reduced editorial freedom as television and other media became dependent on their owners. By the early 2000s media owners became increasingly dependent on the state. ‘After Putin’s election, his administration intensified efforts to enlist media support and to intimidate media outlets that did not fall into line.’² The ascension of Vladimir Putin as president in March 2000 marked the beginning of a new era for Russia: an era of state-sponsored nostalgia, in which television played the central role. ‘There can be little doubt that President Putin wants to restore some aspects of the Soviet past – status as a great power, strong central authority and a stable and predictable society.’³

¹ Frances Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books, 1992.

² Rick Fawn and Stephen White, eds, *Russia After Communism*, Routledge, 2002, p. 149.

³ Stephen R. Barnhart, *International Terrorism and Political Violence*, Trafford Publishing, 2002, p.177.

Ukraine, one of Russia's closest neighbours and long-standing historical partners, was shocked into voting for state independence in 1991 without necessarily understanding the full implications of this step. Unlike Russia, Ukraine had not experienced a roller-coaster-ride style relationship with the West, nor did it become a victim of a serious economic crisis by the end of the 90s. This enabled the country to relate differently to its Soviet past, manifested through a different televisual culture.

In this article I would like to gauge the nature of nostalgic content on television in Russia and Ukraine and illustrate the different televisual cultures that the two countries developed. Despite historical closeness and geographical proximity, as well as tight links between television production systems of the two countries, by the late 2000s Russian and Ukrainian televisual cultures diverged from one another. The most prominent sign of this divergence was marked by their differing attitudes to their Soviet past: while Soviet nostalgia was frequent on Russian TV, Ukrainian television however, referred to it less often.

The difference between the two countries does not stand for a complete polarisation of their cultures. Rather it was the result of different processes through which the two countries have matured into separate producers of mass-culture. While Russia insists on the uniqueness of her own historical path, in Ukraine's case it is the European ideal – 'the idea that Ukraine is an integral part of Europe [which has been] central for national self-identification after the collapse of Soviet Union'⁴ - that is continuously established as the rhetoric of most media outlets.

1 Television and the Creation of 'Nashe'

Historically, television had enjoyed a strong position in the Soviet Union, not only as a source of information and entertainment, but also as an instrument for shaping the imagined Soviet comradeship, much in the same way in which Benedict Anderson (1983) spoke about the 'imagined community' as a sense of belonging to the same nation in which "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship".⁵ Soviet comradeship was established through numerous cultural and political agents and institutions but most vigorously through television as a medium accessible to all and favoured by most.

This Soviet togetherness and comradeship was articulated by the word 'nashe' ('ours' in Russian), which denoted everything Soviet. The use of the word 'nashe' was usually part of evaluative assessments: 'ours' was better than 'theirs', wherein 'ours' referred to Soviet culture, Soviet values and ideals and 'theirs' referred to anything foreign. Soviet television alongside Soviet literature, music and art played a central role in the creation of all things 'ours' and Soviet national identity. This national identity was meant to either wipe out or at least blur the borders of ethnic cultures within the Soviet/Russian Empire. This process of russification, or assimilation into one single identity, affected all republics of the Soviet Union. Ukraine was exposed to this process of russification through Central Soviet TV, which was the main television provider in the area, as local Ukrainian television was limited to a few hours of programming a day, usually folk programming.

While television was central to the creation of Soviet identity, it also played a key role in its dissolution.

Television's crucial role in ending the 1991 coup had to do with its ability to *show* Russians the scale of opposition to the takeover, to *reveal* the trembling hands of the coup-makers as they struggled to justify their illegal actions.⁶

The televising of the **failed coup** proved the potency of the medium over its competitors: radio and printed press.

⁴ Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, ibidem-Verlag, 2010, p.58.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin And Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1983, p.16.

⁶ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Routledge, 2004, p.153.

The immediacy of television translated into its ability to affect and awaken emotions, to gather interest or support. Nationalistic sentiments which had been brewing in Ukraine since the late 1980s, came to the fore through the mass culture of televised events: music festivals, such as **Chervona Ruta**, film festivals, and the **Molodist**, filmed theatrical performances from Ukrainian theatres performing plays, which had been banned under the Soviet rule, or poetry readings.

From here on, Russia and Ukraine embarked on divergent historical paths and related differently to their Soviet past. Soviet nostalgia became predominant on Russian television. Several works speak about the relations between Russian contemporary culture and the Soviet past: Hutchings (2004) speaks about contemporary popular screen culture and the Golden Age of Russian literature⁷; MacFadyen (2008) demonstrates connections between the Soviet 1970s cinema and post-Soviet cinematographic trends in Russia⁸; Ivan Zassoursky (2004) writes about the unique role of classic Soviet films and television series in Russia's national memory and self-image.⁹

Unlike Russia, Ukraine had a different relation to its Soviet past. Although not much has been written about Ukraine in that respect, articles by television critics, interviews with producers and directors as well as an analysis of television schedules show that Ukrainian post-Soviet television was shaped by rapid exposure to global television formats. As of early 2000s Ukrainian producers made a special effort to employ foreign formats, experimenting with audiences' taste. By that time, the taste of Ukrainian audiences diverged away from the taste of Russian viewers, which encouraged Ukrainian producers to experiment with television content uniquely adapted to the local market. Ukrainian television producer Iryna Kostyuk pleaded: "I am hoping there will soon be an understanding that our audience is very different from the Russian audience."¹⁰ These differences, it can be argued, could also be the results of producers' conscious efforts at creating and maintaining a local market, which would provide them with a source of income as well as an outlet for their creativity.

2 Soviet Televisual Culture: from Heyday to 'Sovok'

Just like cinema on Lenin's list of priorities, television became an object of devotion for the Soviet leadership in the wake of the post-Stalinism thaw. According to Roth (2011), Soviet media boomed in the late 1950s:

The growth of Soviets' infrastructure for mass-media culture was nothing short of explosive. Television went from a novelty item – one set for every twelve thousand people on average in 1950 – to a staple of Soviet life – one set for every fifteen people in 1970 and one in four in 1980.¹¹

By 1985 television sets become affordable and widely available:

By the time Mikhail Gorbachev came into office, 93 percent of the population were viewers – virtually all urban households and 90 per cent of rural households. In 1992 fewer than half the people in St. Petersburg and Moscow had more than one television set.¹²

Despite the wide spread of television and ownership of television sets, there was not much variety of programming. Most Soviet viewers had access to only three channels, which broadcast limited content and frequent reruns.

⁷ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Routledge, 2004.

⁸ David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today: Primetime Drama and Comedy*, Routledge, 2008.

⁹ Ivan Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, M.E.Sharpe, 2004.

¹⁰ Nataliia Dan'kova, 'Iryna Kostyuk, an Interview', *Telekritika*, 6 November 2007, <http://www.telekritika.ua/telebachennya/2007-11-06/34742> (retrieved April 1, 2012)

¹¹ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Cornell University Press, 2011, p.11.

¹² Ellen Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.14.

Programming consisted of a handful of programmes and films, repeated on the Central TV channel on an annual basis. There was [Little Blue Light](#) broadcast on the New Year - a variety music and chat show with performances from Soviet pop-stars, led by ubiquitous [Alla Pugacheva](#). [Seventeen Moments of Spring](#) directed by Tatiana Lioznova in 1973 was a World War II spy thriller broadcast annually around Victory Day in May. [KVN](#) (*Club of the Jolly and the Quick-witted*), a student comedy show, was another symbol of Soviet televisual culture. There were also romantic comedies directed by the Woody Allen of Soviet cinema, [Eldar Riazanov](#), dotted around the television calendar which stayed the same for the best part of the 1970s and 80s.

The repetition of this handful of programmes on the Soviet screens helped create dominant symbols that played a role in the construction of Soviet cultural memory. Semiotician Yuri Lotman emphasized the relation between texts, symbols and memory:

Since symbols are important mechanisms of cultural memory, they can transfer texts, plot outlines and other semiotic formations from one level of a culture's memory to another. The national and the area boundaries of cultures are largely determined by a long-standing basic set of dominant symbols in cultural life.¹³

The Soviet televisual imagery captured by the above mentioned programmes formed a layer of Soviet cultural memory, which for many years remained imprinted into audience's practices of remembering.

In the late 1980s - early-90s Soviet viewers were presented for the first time with foreign television content on their home screens, which made Soviet films and programmes appear all too familiar and unexciting. There were MTV music video charts (with performances from [Sting](#) and [Elton John](#)), [Brazilian](#) and [Mexican](#) soap operas and also a few copycat Soviet shows, such as [Pole Chudes](#), modelled on the US *Wheel of Fortune*. Talking about the contrast between the foreign and the domestic content on Soviet television, which audiences experienced in the late USSR, MacFadyen emphasized:

As socialism shuffled inelegantly from the world stage and international awareness grew after the mid- to late 1980s, these Soviet models of television drama began to look woefully old-fashioned.¹⁴

It was then that the whole Soviet experience got a new name: 'Sovok' (Russian for 'dustpan'), which was used to refer to everything Soviet. The West and its ways of life, as seen on the small screen, became an object of longing and an ideal to aim towards. A 'masochistic self-criticism' took over the USSR in its final stages, as Pilkington (2002) described: 'Soviet heritage was parodied... The "West" came to be equated with word civilization.'¹⁵

'Sovok' stood for many things: the Soviet Union as a whole or the Soviet citizen. It became a derogatory term and anyone or anything referred to as 'Sovok' would be automatically reduced to the disparaging meaning of this word, capacious and flippant at once. *The Economist* magazine wrote about a recent analysis of the Soviet experience: "The Soviet past and its institutions were never properly examined; instead, everything Soviet became a subject of ridicule."¹⁶ It remained so until the end of the 1990s.

¹³ Yuri Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A semiotic Theory of Culture*, I.B.Tauris and Co, 1990, p.104.

¹⁴ David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today: Primetime Drama and Comedy*, Routledge, 2008, p. 66.

¹⁵ Hilary Pilkington Hilary, Elena Omel'chenko, Moya Flynn, Uliana Bliudina and Elena Starkova, *Looking West: Cultural Globalization and Russian Youth Cultures*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, p.7.

¹⁶ 'The Long Life of Homo Sovieticus', *The Economist*, December 10, 2011.

3 Post-Soviet Television: Ukrainian versus Russian

The 1990s witnessed a decrease in quality standards of Russian television production. Economic hardship, limitation of state financial support, haphazard privatisation of television channels, purchase of cheap foreign products (primarily, Latin American soaps: *The Rich Also Cry*, *Simply Maria*, as well as a detective TV series **Mike Hammer**) and production of equally cheap domestic content (primarily, violent cop dramas, such as *Ulitsa Razbitykh Fonarei* ('Avenue of Broken Street Lights')) marked a step back in the Russian tradition of televisual culture.

By comparison, Ukraine did not undergo the same level of economic hardship and the establishment of new television channels (e.g. 1+1) was done with considerable foreign support. This enabled a new direction of development of television production in the former post-Soviet state. Unlike Russia, Ukraine experienced much more enthusiasm for trying out new programme forms, different than the ones that had been previously screened on Soviet television. For instance, in the case of **1+1's channel**, the founding director **Aleksandr Rodnyansky**, who had worked for the German TV network ZDF, encouraged trial broadcasts of foreign films, drama series and sitcoms. The widely-used practice of broadcasting in Ukrainian language (which was also used for the dubbing of foreign films and series and which had previously been used only for folk programming on local Ukrainian television) meant that Ukrainian television was fast moving into the direction of a separate mass-culture entity.

Prior to 1991 Ukraine, like other non-Russian republics of the USSR, had one national TV channel, which broadcast mainly folk music concerts and did not broadcast the full twenty-four hours. Shortly after its independence, Ukraine continued to rely on Russian television channels (as Russia had inherited the Central Soviet TV). Within one or two years, local channels started to emerge, first providing news and current affairs broadcasts and later expanding to other types of programming. Unburdened by memories of better times and supposedly high standards, Ukrainian television producers were free to experiment and searched for inspiration outside of Russia.

In both Russia and Ukraine the number of leading television channels has become relatively large, around six channels in each country. All of them have emerged in the years following the collapse of the USSR. Currently, there is no single leader in television entertainment in either country.

In Russia most of the leading channels as of early 2000s have been linked to the Kremlin, either through full or part state ownership or through ownership by Kremlin-loyal media-groups. **ORT 'Pervyi'**, **RTR 'Rossiya'**, **NTV**, **TNT**, **Ren-TV** and **CTC** are all channels that have been loyal to the Kremlin. NTV has belonged in the past to Vladimir Gusinsky, a former oligarch and a critic of Putin, but has been owned by Gazprom since the early 2000s.

In Ukraine, a separation between pro-Russian and pro-Western programming emerged since the coming about of the first post-Soviet channels: **Inter** and 1+1. Inter, launched in 1996, took on a lot of Russian programming and continued to screen Russian television series even after starting its own in-house production. 1+1, launched in 1995, pioneered a lot of Western programming from its very beginning, being one of the first Ukrainian channels to experiment with global TV formats (*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *What's That Tune?*, *Blind Date*, *Fort Boyard*), a trend which was only later picked up by Inter and other channels. Other Ukrainian popular channels were: Novy, ICTV, STB and Ukrayina, which were all privately owned. While they cannot entirely be described as independent of state influence or free of censorship, these channels have enjoyed experimental freedom, which was encouraged by their Western-leaning oligarch owners.

4 Global Formats on Russian and Ukrainian Television

While foreign formats had not been completely absent on Soviet television (e.g. the late Soviet quiz programme *Pole Chudes* ('A Field of Miracles') was a pretty accurate copy of the *Wheel of Fortune*, even though this was never formally acknowledged), the 1990s and especially the early 2000s saw a real surge in format adaptation, a trend common to many television markets around the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union enabled the trade of global formats in the former USSR territory: the emergence of numerous new television channels in numerous new countries provided a market for format-producers and developers. Russia and Ukraine responded to the adoption of Western formats differently.

On one hand Russian TV, the direct successor of Soviet television, tried to maintain its links to the non-mass, 'high' culture characteristic of Soviet television. In a nutshell, this meant what the Soviet television theorist Rassadin described in 1984: 'Direct pithiness, clarity of a moral image and intelligence – that's what makes a difference on television.'¹⁷ By 'makes a difference' he, presumably, meant 'is popular'. The concept of 'intelligence' in this instance refers not only to mental capacities, but also to 'intelligentsia', a class of morally sound intellectuals on whom Russia had relied for centuries for creation, promotion and preservation of high culture. In the mid-90s, the need for intelligentsia's involvement with television was much discussed in the Russian press, with cultural critics bemoaning the loss of high quality and morals to Western low mass-culture.

The introduction of global formats in Russia was seen as an inevitable side effect of opening up to the West. Critic Odintsov, writing about television in the 1990s, claimed that Russian producers managed to come up with their own ideas, uniquely suited for the Russian audiences, and programmes made during that time amazed 'even the Americans' with their originality and quality, despite the lack of resources:

Of course, our producers peeked at Western programmes but we didn't rip them off completely, Odintsov said.¹⁸

Copying global formats was regarded as a negative development for Russian television and this is also emphasized by Hutchings' idea of how Russia "habitually defines itself" in its relation to the West, which has alternately been "idealised or demonised" since the 19th century.¹⁹ The Russian TV producer Aleksandr Nazarov compared television formats to factory machinery, alluding to a Leninesque dream of the time of Russian producers being able to export their own formats.

We just need to learn how to do it. Russian theatrical school is certainly stronger than the American one.²⁰

'American' here is synonymous with "Western" in a discourse where the Cold War may be over politically but continues in the realm of cultural domination.

On the other hand Ukraine, whose history was deep-rooted in both the Russian and the Hapsburg Empire and who also had fewer unsevered ties with the Soviet mythology, produced its first foreign-format based programme: *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, in 2001. Russia had produced a version of the well-known global format too, however the meaning behind its adaptation in the two countries was different, as I will illustrate later on.

Russia was at the start of Putin's era, when 'in the absence of any new vision or identity, the contrast with the

¹⁷ Stanislav Rassadin, *Ispytanie zrelislichem: poeziya i televidenie*, Isskustvo, 1984, p.21.

¹⁸ Petr Odintsov, 'Malinovyie Pidzhaki Kanuli V Letu?', *Kultura-Portal*, No7380, 29 May - 4 June, 2003, http://www.kultura-portal.ru/tree_new/cultpaper/article.jsp?number=452&rubric_id=1002057&crubric_id=1002140&pub_id=423083, (retrieved 27.01.2011).

¹⁹ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Routledge, 2004, p.158.

²⁰ Yuri Bogomolov, Aleksandr Nazarov, 'TV Series Phenomenon: from "Slave Izaura" to our days', *RIA Novosti*, July 27, 2006. Last accessed July 2012 at: <http://ria.ru/online/20060721/51660891.html>

1990s could only be achieved by appealing to a period that preceded it—the late Soviet Union²¹. This meant that nostalgia was on its way back in. For Ukraine it was the start of a decade of experimentation with foreign formats and enthusiasm for foreign content. While a lot of television content in the early years of Ukraine’s independency came from Russia, starting from the early 2000s, Ukrainian television broadcast both ready-made programmes and programme formats that were purchased or otherwise borrowed from the West.

In the process of domesticating foreign ideas and adapting foreign formats, Ukrainian producers had far fewer qualms about their foreign origins, unlike their Russian colleagues who voiced objections to formats adaptations. It seems that Ukrainians, with a non-existent television history to look back on, adopted a more pragmatic attitude to making use of all available content and ideas. Ukrainian television producer Aleksey Goncharenko described the situation as follows:

In America TV started developing at the end of 1930s, in Ukraine – in the mid-1990s. That’s a gap of 60 years! Whilst Ukraine was in slumber, like a Sleeping Beauty, everything has been thought of and invented. Of course, it is possible to think of *some* new things, but it is impossible to create anything *completely* new on TV.²²

Ukrainian TV producers chose to *adopt* global television formats often making little changes and promoting their foreign origins by advertising them in cooperation with the producers of the original programme.

In Russia, a degree of global television formats utilisation was inevitable. As mentioned earlier, one of the most popular late Soviet TV programmes, a quiz *Pole Chudes* (“Field of Miracles”) was clearly based on the *Wheel of Fortune* format. Unlike in Ukraine, foreign formats were *adapted* and used as rough outlines of programmes to be filled with ‘uniquely Russian’ and - from 2000 onwards - increasingly USSR-nostalgic content. Soviet pop-singers like Alla Pugacheva, as well as Soviet TV presenters, Soviet actors and film directors, were now being heralded as ‘Russian’ artists and brought back on Russian television. Many of them weren’t ethnically Russian and had been born in Ukraine or Georgia or other former Soviet republics, but most of them had moved to Moscow or St. Petersburg in the course of their careers and had become symbols of the stable Soviet times.

In Ukraine, on the other hand, television producers driven by potential advertising revenues rather than by any strong patriotic agenda, began developing a set of local television celebrities: Ukrainian presenters, pop-singers, actors and the like. By contrast to the Russian television elites, they were, with rare exception, much younger and had no Soviet connotations. As a result, an appearance on the small screen of a Ukrainian 30-year-old musician would bring about a completely different set of associations than an appearance of a 70-year Russian-Soviet singer who’d shaken hands with Brezhnev.

It is in this way that *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* shaped different meanings in Russia and Ukraine. For instance, a screening of [Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? on the 1+1 channel](#) in 2005 featured the young Ukrainian rock star Sviatoslav Vakarchuk who had barely appeared on TV beforehand. By contrast, the [Russian version](#) would feature Russian stars such as pop-singer Filiip Kirkorov and Masha Rasputina, who were well engrained in the Soviet memory and the USSR past.

²¹ ‘The Long Life of Homo Sovieticus’, *The Economist*, December 10, 2011.

²² Aleksey Goncharenko, ‘Interview’, *Telekritika*, 7 June 2006, <http://www.telekritika.ua/lyudi/2006-06-07/7093>, retrieved July 2012.

5 Nostalgia for the USSR and Desire for Europe

In the 2000s Russia, whilst regaining its economic and political stability and redeeming its international reputation, was characterized by a return to the Soviet cultural tradition. ‘Tradition is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvented by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding it’ argued Giddens.²³ In this case reinvention meant idealising and glossing over much of the Soviet dullness (or what had been perceived as dullness only ten years earlier) to present it anew as a perfect example of high artistic quality and value.

The notion of high quality fitted into the discourse of cultural superiority and disillusionment with Western artistic standards, which was typical for the early 2000s in Russia. As Hutchings (2004) wrote in his study of the relationship between Russian literature and the screen:

Soviet Russia’s logocentric culturedness is one of the few ‘untarnished’ qualities of the communist era that can be redeployed within the present to differentiate the new Russian self from the foreign model underlying it.²⁴

This culturedness referred not only to the classics of Russian literature but also to the classics of Soviet cinema. Quotes from films such as *The Irony of Fate* or *Seventeen Moments of Spring* became part of what Hutchings described as ‘metacode’ of the traditional popular culture.²⁵

An example of the reinvention of the traditional Soviet imagery on Russian television is the reuse of the most evocative scenes from the Soviet 1973 production *Semnadtsat’ Mgnovenii Vesny* (“Seventeen Moments of Spring”). The scene is a silent encounter between Stierlitz and his wife in a cafe in Switzerland, arranged by compassionate Soviet authorities as Stierlitz is about to embark on a complex operation in his spying mission within the Third Reich. He had not seen his wife for many years. The **scene** is accompanied by a sentimental soundtrack, a song performed by a veteran Soviet singer, Iosif Kobzon.

This scene, often referred to as ‘Stierlitz in Kafe Elefant’ has been frequently reused and parodied on Russian television. In **a sketch** broadcast as part of the 2010 New Year Eve’s comedy show: *Olivié* (named after a kind of Russian salad traditionally eaten at New Year) on **Pervyi Kanal**, Stierlitz is played by a young performer and the role of his wife is filled by **Anna Chapman**, a Russian woman who had been deported from the US a few months earlier for allegedly spying for the Russian state. In this sketch, both Stierlitz and Anna are nostalgic spies, meeting in a cafe, sharing thoughts about the home they miss. The **scene** ends with Anna Chapman delivering traditional best wishes for the New Year to her compatriots.

Stierlitz is part of the Soviet televisual heritage, which Russia owns along with Lenin’s mausoleum. Quoting from the memoirs of the Soviet actor, Viacheslav Tikhonov, famous for playing both a Soviet World War spy Stierlitz in the *Seventeen Moments of Spring* and Prince Bolkonskii in the earlier, Oscar-winning movie *War and Peace*, MacFadyen (2008) wrote:

When Tikhonov asked a young girl which part of *War and Peace* she liked best, she replied: “The scene where Natasha dances with Stierlitz.”²⁶

Ukraine, on the other hand, in the first two decades of post-Soviet TV production often appeared to choose different paradigms for the creation of a new cultural hybrid. Having a limited repository of past programme forms, television producers fell back not only on imported genres but also on imported content in an attempt to create new meanings to reach out for local audiences. If in the 2011 final of the Russian version of the *X-factor* – *Factor A*, the winner

²³ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p.37.

²⁴ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Routledge, 2004, p.166.

²⁵ Stephen Hutchings, *Russian Literary Culture in the Camera Age*, Routledge, 2004, p.166.

²⁶ David MacFadyen, *Russian Television Today: Primetime Drama and Comedy*, Routledge, 2008, p.p.35-36.

performed a Russian White Guard romance: **'Yesaul'** ('Officer'), in the 2010 final of the Ukrainian *Ukraina Maye Talant* ("Ukraine's Got Talent") the winner, a blind singer, performed **'Je Suis Malade'** in French. The White Guard song brought back romantic memories of the Civil War, which followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The 'Imperial Russia' paradigm, of which the White Guard is an integral part, does not contradict the Soviet paradigm. Both are part of the pool of idealised memories, which are meant to construct a vision of a stable and cultured past. In the Ukrainian show, a French song was chosen to beautify the personal predicament of the blind singer, but also emphasize the progressive, "equal-opportunities" style of the programme. The singer had to follow the lyrics of the song written in Braille and feel them with the tips of her fingers as she performed. This act had all the makings of a European, rather than Soviet or Russian, ideal with corresponding origins and prospects.

Having surrendered the Soviet heritage to Russia in the post-Soviet cultural division, Ukrainian producers were left with a need to create their own paradigms. The Ukrainian post-Soviet television production model was not based on Soviet spies in Gestapo or on Tolstoy's screen adaptations. Instead, in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union a comprehensive effort was made for Ukrainian TV output to embrace a pan-European identity. Ukraine was not alone in this drive for a European identity, which was destined to fill the gap left behind by the pan-Soviet identities. In that respect, Ukraine's case echoed similar gaps left behind pan-Eastern-European and pan-Yugoslav identities in the Soviet bloc. 'The shift toward "pan-Europeanism" may be considered a kind of "imported nationalism" that attempts to abolish peripheralism', argued Slavko Splichal (1994).²⁷ European-ness was applied as a tool for strengthening a new identity without isolating it.

Throughout the 2000s Ukrainian TV programmes featured celebrities from three sources: Ukraine, Russia and the West. Neither Ukrainian nor Russian celebrities originated in the Soviet past. Firstly, there were few famous *Soviet* Ukrainians celebrities and secondly, it was easier for Ukrainian channels to book and afford the fee of a "lesser", often younger, Russian celebrity. That is why neither Alla Pugacheva, nor Iosif Kobzon made their appearances on Ukrainian screens. Instead, singers like **Diana Arbenina** or the ostentatious music critic **Sergey Sosedov** did appear on Ukrainian television. A dancing talent show based on the format *So You Think You Can Dance*, adopted in Ukraine as *Tantsiut' Vsi* ('Everybody Dance') featured the British dancer **Sisco Gomez** in the jury. He spoke English live on air, while being simultaneously translated in Ukrainian. The STB channel later adopted the *X-factor* format which featured some major invited Western stars such as Gloria Gaynor and Kylie Minogue.

Ukrainian television producers adopted a pragmatic rather than a nationalistic approach to programme making and established that the needs of Ukrainian audiences differed from those of Russian viewers. One of the differences noted was a gradual decrease of interest in 'old', Soviet programming. As a Ukrainian producer Iryna Kostyuk pointed out in 2007:

I hope that it will soon be understood that our audiences are very different from Russian. There are plenty of examples when programmes, popular in Russia, fail in Ukraine. I always draw the example of *KVN (The Club of the Merry and the Resourceful)*, which is a top-rated programme in Russia. It used be a foolproof product here as well and Ukrainian channels used to fight for the broadcasting rights. But it has since slid outside of prime-time slots and audience figures are far from great.²⁸

Another example of the differences between Russian and Ukrainian television is *KVN*, a comedy sketch show that dates back to the late 1950s and the post-Stalinist renaissance in Soviet popular culture. Possibly inspired by a Czechoslovak format, *Gadai Gadai Gadalschik*²⁹ it is one of the longest-lasting programmes on Soviet/Russian television, hosted by one of the USSR/Russia's longest-lasting presenters **Aleksandr Masliakov**. Out of circulation in the early 1980s, it was revived in the late 80s and went from strength to strength in the 90s and 2000s. The format of the show includes teams of students competing in stand-up comedy. It remained very popular in Russia at the start of

²⁷ Slavko Splichal, *Media Beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe*, Westview Press, 1994, p.124.

²⁸ Nataliia Dan'kova, 'Iryna Kostyuk, an Interview', *Telekritika*, 6 November 2007, <http://www.telekritika.ua/telebachennya/2007-11-06/34742> (retrieved April 1, 2012).

²⁹ Christine Evans, *From Truth to Time: Soviet Central Television 1957-1985*, PhD dissertation, University of California, 2010, p.147.

the 2010s, whereas in Ukraine it has been replaced by domestic comedy shows, often revolving around *surzhyk*, an ungrammatical form of Ukrainian, as spoken by native Ukrainian speakers who are attempting to pretend they speak Russian. In other words, Ukrainian comedy shows moved on into a terrain which would be alien to most Russian viewers.

6 Conclusion

Russia and Ukraine remain fairly close in terms of cultural flows, especially television, where the exchange penetrates most production stages. Many television series travel between the two countries with relative ease and success. Increasingly, however, throughout the 2000s the two drifted apart with Russian television growingly involved with nostalgic content and Ukrainian television opting for a more outward, pan-European 'look and feel', with studio-based programmes, the so-called "unscripted" programming of reality and talent shows.

It would be simplistic to claim that Russian post-Soviet television presents a hermetically sealed system which feeds on itself, only using the past as a source of imagery. It would also not be entirely true to claim that Ukrainian television had rid itself of the Soviet past. But there is a clear difference in the fact that a lot of Russian programming, even when it is based on global TV formats (perhaps, the tendency is more pronounced in that case), leans towards the Soviet televisual past, an outlet of "quality" mass culture, which includes Soviet films from the 1970s, an era particularly popular with the Putin administration.

Ukrainian post-Soviet television, which started in 1991 with a modest level of production, has been busy shaping a new televisual imagery to replace the previous Soviet one. It made use of new celebrities, new programming trends and Western formats. The result was an abundance of talent shows where contestants performed in foreign languages or a rise of young television presenters under thirty.

In the years 2000s, Ukraine embarked on an active search for global formats. By 2010 Ukraine became the second country, after the US, to purchase the Dutch hit format 'The Voice'³⁰. Russian TV producers, on the other hand, became increasingly involved in developing programming based on traditionally successful Russian and Soviet pursuits. *Bolero*, for instance, was a Russian show where prima ballerinas danced with champion figure skaters, both firmly rooted in the culture of the Soviet *nashe*.

³⁰"Ukraine and USA were two countries who started working on adopting the format following in the Dutch footsteps.", from the *Holos Krayiny* website: <http://goloskrainy.tv/pro-show/info>

Biography

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